

RICK BAKER! ALIENS! MEN IN BLACK 3!

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#262
JUL/AUG 2012



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Yasuyuki Inoue
1922-2012

Kampai! We're back and proud to bring you another fang-tastic "All Japanese Monsters" issue of FM, but it is also with a heavy heart, as many of the people who brought these films to life have been taken by Prince Siriki since the last time we met here. This issue is dedicated to them, including the gentle and soft-spoken man who masterminded all of Toho's intricate miniature sets, designed many of the awesome super-weapons, and designed the Smog Monster. I had the privilege and honor to meet him and his patience and generosity were boundless. May he and all of the others rest in peace, but as Uncle Forry used to say, but they SHALL NOT DIE!

—August Ragone

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Bob Eggleton!



&... Bob Eggleton!

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OPENING WOUNDS

FAMOUS MONSTERS has always occupied a unique place on the magazine rack. While many of its newsstand companions are dedicated to up-to-the-minute and cutting edge happenings, FM's stated mission has been to keep alive the traditions and legends of classic horror, Sci-Fi, and fantasy, while still For-aging for the next generation of imagination. And while that's always sounded nice, the truth is far simpler: FM reminds us of being young, of simpler times when staying up late to watch a horror movie was a special occasion (or something done behind your parents' backs), when a "tough day" was trying to make sure you got the paint to dry just right on your new Aurora kit. But for me, childhood monsters weren't the classic Universal characters that so many others grew up with.

See, I had the great privilege of spending the first few years of my life on this planet living in the town of Iwakuni, Japan. My first memories involve eating sticky buns in the basket on the rear of my mom's bicycle as she navigated the narrow streets, groups of uniformed schoolgirls running up to me to touch my blonde hair, and—of course—Godzilla. While it would be years before I would see the films, there was always a familiarity and fondness that I had for Godzilla, Ultraman, Rodan, Mothra, and so many more that can only come with having those images hardwired into one's brain in the formative stages of youth (that's called good parenting). From the covers of magazines to posters in the local shops, to catching an occasional episode of ULTRAMAN on our small B&W TV, I always assumed that the giant monsters and heroes of Japan were as built in to the landscape as Mt. Fuji.

So it is with great pleasure that I approached Japanese monster expert August Ragone and his all-star Ota-krew to once again rampage through the pages of FM, unleashing all manner of massive beasts and robots. From some of the "biggest" names in kaiju to those who haven't gotten all the attention, this issue guarantees to be another fun ride down memory lane with the beasts from the far east. I owe much gratitude to him and his team for their fantastic work.

This issue is also another chance to remind ourselves that there are still many people suffering from the tragedies that befell Japan last year. Please go to redcross.org to find out how you can lend a hand.

In closing, I hope that you have as much fun reading this issue as I had putting it together with the team. It has been a wonderful journey that has taken me back to my earliest memories and conjured images seemingly lost to time. Throughout the process I was reminded of Forry's words, which I'll leave you with now, that he would often say to those that had stopped pursuing their dreams or loving their monsters simply because they had gotten older, words that embody the essence of FM: "You weren't supposed to grow up, pal."

Ed Blair
Executive Editor

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Greetings Monster Kids! Welcome to another addition of Fangmail. We are always axe-cepting your letters, photos, and art!

Dear Famous folks,

To start off, I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed reading #2611. Honestly I think its your best issue so far... And thank you so much for dedicating #192 to me...that is just so cool!

Now on to Godzilla and company.

I have such fond memories of going to my local theater on Saturdays and watch the lasted giant monster movie. Starting with King Kong vs. Godzilla and going thru Godzilla vs. The Smog Monster!

Some of my favorites include Godzilla vs. The Thing, King Kong Escapes, Destroy All Monsters and Frankenstein Conquers the World!

I also have fun memories of watching Ultra-Man every afternoon after coming home from school.

But I have to admit, I wasn't too crazy about Gamera.

Anyway, I'm 'lurking forrward' to the new issue!

Beast wishes,

Malcolm Gittins



When I was little, my pop took me to see Godzilla vs. The Thing at the now gone Fortway movie theater in Brooklyn, New York. I was already Godzilla fan, thanks to WPIX, channel 11 showing the original on Thursdays, but this was the first time I saw one in color!

Longtime FM fan,
Rob Morganbesser
Staten Island, NY

To all those Famous Monsters at heart,

I am another of those old fans from the late 1950s that cut my eye teeth on Famous Monsters magazines. I still remember how I looked forward to trips down town when we stopped at our local bookstore and I pondered how to spend my meager allowance. Somehow, Famous Monsters always won out. Over the years I strayed from monster movies and the macabre. But after writing about local 1960s Shock Theater host Gregory Grave (aka Harvey Brunswick) and later receiving a phone call from him, I regained my interest. Then in the 1990s I was able to complete one of my bucket of blood list's goals by finally meeting Forrest J Ackerman in person at a screening of THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL. Just when you think you've outgrown your love of movie monsters they drag you back in! Then, just months ago, I rediscovered Famous Monsters. An old friend has returned and I'm hooked again. What a joy it is to find Famous Monsters once more and again listen to the children of the night—what sweet music you make....

Sincerely,
Glen Enloe

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RICK BAKER ON

MIB³



With the first *MEN IN BLACK*, the whole process was really challenging in that Barry Sonnenfeld, Steven Spielberg, and Walter Parkes all wanted to be involved in the design process, but they were all in different places. I think Barry was working on some other movie. He said to me, "I've never even seen a science fiction movie... Those kinds of things scare me." At first I was like, "Oh my God. What am I getting myself into?" But then I said to myself, let's try to be positive about this. This actually could be a really good thing. If he doesn't know science fiction films, he's not going to do cliché stuff that we all know. Hopefully he'll bring something to it that will be fresh and unique.

My biggest problem was that when I got a script, it was a movie about this agency that regulates aliens on earth, and I didn't think there were enough aliens in it. There were very few instances of aliens in the script, and the ones that were there I didn't think were cool enough. I mean, Edgar, the Vincent D'Onofrio character—the

bug thing—was in there, but in the original script, the big reveal to Will Smith's character that there were aliens on earth happens in a bar, and Tommy Lee Jones says to Will, "Aliens are everywhere." And Will's going, "Yeah, sure." And he would say, "Well, Chucky the bartender is an alien. Show him, Chucky." In the script it says Chucky lifts up his neck and light comes out. And I said, to me this is a really missed opportunity. This is where we see that there are aliens on earth, and a guy lifts up his head and light comes out? I'm sorry, that's lame. And they said, all right, so come up with a better idea.

So we were kicking ideas around, and we came up with the little green man in his head piloting this robot human, or whatever it is, and his face opens up and you see the little guy inside the head.

The funny thing was that nobody was really making any decisions. My routine line about *MEN IN BLACK* now is that I think we did more designs in that movie than the whole rest of my





career put together. Nobody committed to anything, basically. At the time, I had this really great artist Carlos Wentay working with me. I suggested that they have, in the MIB headquarters, a passport control section, where the aliens actually get their disguises. I said to Carlos, I want a drawing of this counter, a passport place, and you have aliens standing in line, and you have the MIB guys handing them their human suits on one end, and then at the other end you have aliens who look strange, but still are human enough to pass.

I thought we would get through the design process pretty fast and start making stuff, so one of the first things I did was hire a crew. I had a lot of people with not a lot to do, at first. I would call Barry numerous times to say, I don't understand this. How are they getting these disguises... Are they makeup or some magical thing? How does a giant bug actually fit inside the body of a normal sized man? There was a lot of logic and things I was having problems with. Barry would always say, "It doesn't really matter." And in the end, it didn't! With the Edgar bug they kept saying well, you know, he just folds up like a Swiss Army knife or something. And I said yeah, but his forearm joint is like five or six feet long, so it would still never fit inside a human arm! And they would say, "You're over thinking this stuff, Rick." And I was. None of us knew what MEN IN BLACK would be, really. It was a process of discovery in the course of making the movie. Fortunately, Barry and I had turned out to be a really good choices for it and brought some really good stuff.

I think the first MEN IN BLACK is a unique movie, and I actually think MIB 3 is much closer to the original [than MIB 2]. I think people are going to really like it. The studio always wanted to make another one, but they were saying it was never going to happen, because everybody's percentage added up to more than 100%. Then, surprisingly—kinda out of the blue, actually—I got an email from Barry, and he was saying, "It looks like there's going to be an MIB 3 and please say you'll work on it with me. I know you're kinda retired, but I can't see doing this movie without you." And I said, "Yeah, I would be more than happy. And I'm not retired. I'm just being selective about the things that I do. But I would for sure want to do MIB3."

We had a meeting at Walter Parkes' office. It was a weird, déjà vu, time-travel thing because I was sitting in a room with Barry Sonnenfeld, Walter Parkes, Will Smith, Bo Welch, and Doug Harlocker—who was the prop guy in the MIB films—and we were all talking about MIB again, this many years later! It was cool. They had sent me a script, and I really liked the script. This was many months before we were actually supposed to start shooting. I just thought, well, this is great. We had a really good script and the whole team was hack together, and it was gonna be cool. And the first thing I started doing was rewriting the script.

There's no secret now that there's a time travel element in the movie. They go back to 1969, and right away, the first thing I thought of was retro aliens in the 60s. The aliens that we see in MIB headquarters in 1969 should be totally different from the ones in 2012. And I really thought

it would be fun for them to be old school, big-brained, bug-eyed aliens with fish bowl space helmets and stuff.

They liked that idea. It was something I had originally pitched in the first movie, because they kept saying, "We want to see aliens unlike anything we've seen before." And I said, "Yeah, but the problem is that we've seen a hunch of aliens now." It was different when I did aliens for STAR WARS. Ever since that cantina scene, there have been a million cantina scenes in movies and TV shows and STAR TREK movies. It was going to be really hard to make something we haven't seen before. So my thought was that we make them look like something we've seen before, but a cooler version of it. I said I thought it would be cool if it were like Paul Blaisdell actually came across real aliens that looked like Saucer Men, and he did his version of them for a film. I just like the idea of duplicating a lot of the aliens I like, but making a slightly updated and cooler version.

They didn't like the idea, back then. I tried again on MIB 2, and they still didn't like it. But when I pitched the retro alien thing for MIB 3, they said yes. I said, I still think we should do aliens like things that I know and love from my youth. That's what made this film even that much more fun—to get to do aliens reminiscent of things that I had seen in films in the 50s and 60s... THIS ISLAND EARTH, INVASION OF THE SAUCER MEN... I mean, we were referencing OUTER LIMITS. Pretty much any old science fiction film had some kind of element that we borrowed from, and tried to improve upon to a degree. I was hoping to have everybody in a space helmet and have ray guns and stuff. There's one alien that's kind of like Big Daddy Roth. It was just all the stuff that I love. We kicked around a lot of ideas, and even ripped off some of my own old designs.

I think, at last count, we ended up with 125 aliens made. One of the big problems with MIB 3 was that it was all filmed in New York. It was some kind of tax break deal. We had to use NY people,

Rick Baker sporting the classic alien "brainium" as he works his own monster magic on himself.



and they didn't want to hire actors for the aliens—they wanted them all to be like extras. They wanted to bring people in on the day of filming. So we were having to make stuff for people we didn't even know. So I thought we should do this mix and match thing, like Mr. Potato Head makeup. We'd get a number of different casts of different people, and we'd make different big brains and big head appliances and different foreheads and cheekbones and different ears and gills and fins and blobs and stuff, and we'd have all these smaller separate pieces to try on the person. You know, "This head fits him, and we can put these eyes on him, and we can put these ears, and we can put this chin, and glue a little bit of hair here, or put some scales over here." A lot of the aliens were done that way. The guys in the shop here were really resisting the idea at first, but to me, it seemed like a lot of fun to have this whole bag full of alien parts and to stick them together and see what comes out. It could go horribly wrong or it could be brilliant. And it kinda went both ways. Sometimes it worked. Sometimes it was like OK, that one didn't look too good...

I usually do the designs on the computer, whether it be ZBrush or a Photoshop painting, or taking photos of things and pasting them together and distorting them. A lot of times we start with clay, sculpt a little head, and play around. It wasn't just me; I had crew of really talented guys. One of the things that was really fun was that I got a lot of my old crew back. Some people hadn't worked for me in a very long time. Sometimes I would give them a computer drawing, and they would do something that was a lot better than what I gave them. Sometimes it was just like well, let's just do something and see what you come up with. It really varies. There's a character that

they ended up calling The Weasel—part of Boris's character, Jemaine Clement plays Boris, who's kind of the main bad guy. He's kind of like the Edgar in this movie. That was one of the things in MIB 3, the character was in the script was originally Yaz,



and he was a biker, and they kept saying he looked like Dennis Hopper from EASY RIDER. In the script, it said that the big payoff in the end was that he was a virus and that was one of the things in the first script that I thought needed work. I said, "I don't understand this. What this virus guy is. I think it needs to be something cooler. And why is he a biker? Is he dressed like a biker?" I came up with what I thought would work, and they went with a lot of it.

We made a lot of practical things. The problem, again, was that in the course of filming, we had numerous days in MIB headquarters where they would go, OK, we want 35 aliens today. But it would be on a day when

they had Will Smith, Tommy Lee Jones, and Emma Thompson. The priority is to shoot their big stars. So the aliens in the MIB headquarters are often background guys, so far back they're out of focus. That's what happened on the other MIB movies, and I knew that going into this. We made very elaborate aliens that you could base a whole film around—you know, we had multiple parts for them and they did all kinds of things—but when you see the final movie, they're in a three second shot in the background of something. So I said, let's approach this differently. I would rather make more aliens and not have them be so mechanically elaborate. Let's just know the camera is just going to

half-pointed at them, and they're gonna be way in the background. So we made a lot of really cool masks. I also thought to take advantage of digital technology, and if they are seen and they need an eye blink, the digital guys can put an eye blink on them. I mean, anytime I can make a monster, period, I feel lucky and I have fun. Movie making is a frustrating business, but I really have no right to complain about it. MEN IN BLACK 3 definitely had its frustration, but it was also a lot of fun, and I think the movie is really going to be good. **M**

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IN MEMORIAM

A Remembrance of the Those Who Contributed to Japanese Fantasy Films & Television

TOSHIYUKI HOSOKAWA: 1940 - January 14, 2011

DI/Actor: ZATOICHI: THE OUTLAW, EROS+MASSACRE, FEMALE PRISONER SCORPION: GRUDGE SONG

SHOICHIRO OKUBO: July 4, 1947 - February 11, 2011

Screenwriter: MITO KOMON, LUPIN III, PARMAN, NINJA HATTORI-KUN, etc.

KAN TOKUMARU: May 26, 1941 - March 6, 2011

Voice Actor: TEKKAMAN, GAIKING, VOTOMS, ZYURANGER, etc.

MORIBI MURANO: September 5, 1941 - March 7, 2011

Animator: BIG X, KIMBA THE WHITE LION, DAGGER OF KAMUI, etc.

HIROSHI KAKOI: ? - March 11, 2011

Animator/Producer: ASTRO BOY '80, MACROSS, BUBBLEGUM CRISIS

SEIICHIRO UJIE: May 17, 1926 - March 28, 2011

Producer: DETECTIVE CONAN, PRINCESS MONONOKE, SPIRITED AWAY

SAWAKO NOMA: July 27, 1943 - March 30, 2011

President of Kodansha Publishing, Producer of AKIRA

ERIKO KISHIDA: January 5, 1929 - April 7, 2011

Author/Poet, Sister of Actors Kyoko Kishida and Shin Kishida

OSAMU DEZAKI: November 18, 1943 - April 17, 2011

Animator: TOMORROW'S JOE, LUPIN III, COBRA, TREASURE ISLAND, THE MIGHTY ORBOTS

AKINARI MATSUNO: 1979 - April 18, 2011

Novelist: LIL'AOBA AND THE ALIEN

SEIICHIRO UNO: February 27, 1927 - April 26, 2011

Music Composer: ADVENTURES OF THE MONKEY KING, AMAZING 3, MOONIN, etc.

NOBUHIRO AIHARA: ? - April 30, 2011

Animator: LUPIN III, AKIRA, NIGHT ON THE GALACTIC RAIL ROAD

SHIGERU OKADA: March 2, 1924 - May 9, 2011

Former President of Toei Studios

MITSUKI NAKAMURA: April 7, 1944 - May 16, 2011

Animator: SPEED RACER, GATCHAMAN, GUNDAM, DIRTY PAIR, etc.

TOMOKO KAWAKAMI: April 25, 1970 - June 9, 2011

Voice Actress: UTENA, MARTIAN SUCCESSOR NADESICO, FULL METAL ALCHEMIST

HIROSHI TAKEUCHI: August 7, 1955 - June 27, 2011

Author and Historian: Joined Tsuburaya Productions in 1970, at the age of 14, and went freelance in 1987. Established the "Kaiju Club", which boasts such famous members as artist Yuji Kaida, make-up artist/director Tomoo Haraguchi, writer Ryusuke Hino, and author Kensho Ikeda. Also wrote under the pen-name Toshio Sakai.

SHINJI WADA: April 19, 1950 - July 5, 2011

Cartoonist: MY FRIEND FRANKENSTEIN, SUKEBAN DEKA

HIDEÔ TANAKA: November 24, 1933 - July 9, 2011

Director of numerous Toei Superhero Series and films, including SUKEBAN DEKA



YOSHIO HARADA: February 29, 1940 - July 19, 2011

Actor: SHOGUN'S SAMURAI, LADY SNOWBLOOD, RONINGAI, RAMPO, DORORO

TOYOO ASHIDA: April 21, 1944 - July 23, 2011

Animator: SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO, CYBORG 009, FIST OF THE NORTH STAR, VAMPIRE HUNTER D

SAKYO KOMATSU: January 8, 1931 - July 26, 2011

Science Fiction Author: JAPAN SINKS, BYE-BYE JUPITER, etc.

JUNPEI TAKIGUCHI: April 17, 1931 - August 29, 2011

Voice Actor: MAZINGER Z, BORN FREE, AIZENBORG, YATTERMAN, DRAGON BALL Z

JERRY DEAN FELLOWS: ? - August 30, 2011

Fanzine Co-Editor: "Space Fanzine Yamato"/"Space Webzine Yamato"

KAZUYOSHI YOKOTA: ? - September 7, 2011

Animator: MAETEL LEGEND, KIMERA, COSMO WARRIOR ZERO, AYAKASHI, etc.

KEI AOYAMA: September 26, 1979 - October 2011

Cartoonist: SWWEEET!, CHINA GIRL

TATSUJI KAJITA: May 24, 1936 - October 8, 2011

Illustrator of various Children's Magazines featuring Godzilla, Ultraman, etc.

YEN YAMAGUCHI: March 24, 1956 - October 24, 2011

Voice Actor: KINNIKUMAN, FIST OF THE NORTH STAR, TRANSFORMERS, MACHINE ROBO, etc.

TOSHIRO ISHIDO: July 17, 1932 - November 1, 2011

Screenwriter: NIGHT AND FOG OF JAPAN, OPERATION: MYSTERY, RETURN OF ULTRAMAN, ULTRAMAN ACE, ULTRAMAN LEO

KAZUKO UTE: February 4, 1927 - November 17, 2011

Voice Actress: ADVENTURES OF THE MONKEY KING

SHINGO ARAKI: January 1, 1939 - December 1, 2011

Animator/Character Designer: DEVILMAN, CUTEY HONEY, UFO ROBO: DREDD, SPACE REWELL TO SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO, GALAXY EXPRESS 999, SAINT SEIYA

MAMORU UCHIYAMA: January 16, 1949 - December 1, 2011

Cartoonist, Ultraman Series Manga

SHINICHI ICHIKAWA: April 17, 1941 - December 10, 2011

Multi-Award Winning Writer ULTRA SEVEN, RETURN OF ULTRAMAN, ULTRAMAN ACE

YASUYUKI INOUE: November 26, 1922 - February 19, 2012

Visual Effects Art Director: GODZILLA, RODAN, THE MYSTERIAN, THE THUNDERBOLT, THE WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS, DESTROY ALL MONSTERS, etc.

NOBORU ISHIGURO: August 24, 1938 - March 20, 2012

Animator/Director: MARINE BOY, SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO, MACROSS, MEGAZONE, LEGEND OF THE GALACTIC HEROES, etc.

TAKESHI AONO: June 19, 1936 - April 9, 2012

Actor/Voice Actor: BIG X, GATCHAMAN, FIST OF THE NORTH STAR, GALAXY EXPRESS 999, LEGEND OF THE GALACTIC HEROES, DRAGON BALL Z, ONE PIECE, etc. Played Alien Zarab in Episode 18 of ULTRAMAN and Shiro Souda in the SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO saga (1974-2000). He was also the voice of Noran in the Japanese dubbed version of STAR TREK: THE ORIGINAL SERIES.

IN MEMORIAM LIST
ASSEMBLED BY
AUGUST RAGONE &
JOHN PAUL CASSIDY

**This isn't your father's Star Blazers...
but the Yamato Spirit is still the same**

Back in the far-off year of 1977, FM 150 previewed what seemed to be an exciting animated space adventure from Japan entitled **SPACE CRUISER YAMATO**, which almost no one in America saw (except for spotty Midwest theatrical bookings and a one-hour television broadcast in Los Angeles). Most of the continent had to wait three more years to see the original television under a wholly different title: **STAR BLAZERS**. While syndicated and with virtually no merchandising campaign to back it up, by riding high on the Sci-Fi boom started by **STAR WARS**, the series caught the imagination of viewers from coast to coast, who were taken aback by the mature storylines, complex characters, ground-breaking design, and full score. **STAR BLAZERS** laid the foundation for anime fandom, not only in the States, but in Japan as well, where it aired under its original title, **SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO** (*Uchu Senkan Yamato*). It debuted on Japanese television in 1974, and the original story is now coming back in a lavish 26-episode remake entitled **SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO: 2199!**

In the year 2199, mankind is facing extinction. The intergalactic Gamillas Empire has declared war against humanity by raining

deadly Planet Bombs down on the Earth's surface, turning it into an atomic graveyard. Even though the survivors are huddled into underground cities, the radioactive pallorion threatens to eradicate all life within a year. Suddenly, a benevolent hand reaches out from across the void. Queen Starsha of Iscandar sends plans for a faster-than-light engine and offers a device that will restore the Earth, but there is a catch: in order to retrieve this "Golden Fleece", these 22nd Century Argonauts must travel 148,000 light-years to her planet and return before mankind perishes. Risking everything, mankind completes their one last hope in making this voyage across the universe: Space Battleship Yamato.

Conceived by producer Yoshinobu Nishizaki and visualized by manga artist Leiji Matsumoto, **SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO** was an animated television series that challenged the medium in terms of concept, storytelling, and human drama. Unfortunately, the initial broadcast of **YAMATO** was up against the fantastically high-rated animated series **HEIDI, GIRL OF THE ALPS** (boasting the talents of a young Hayao Miyazaki!), and ultimately failed to find its audience, forcing **Yamato TV** to cut the planned 39 episodes down to 26. Despite losing 13 episodes, Nishizaki's crew pulled together and delivered a memorable last arc that made **Yamato** stronger in the long run. Even though it was deemed a ratings failure, **YAMATO** garnered a loyal fan base of teenagers and young adults who, by writing letters and publishing fanzines, wouldn't let it die. Due to this intense fan loyalty, late media attention, and Nishizaki's prostrating to **Yamato TV**, **YAMATO** was re-broadcast to higher ratings in 1975, even garnering a coveted **Seiund Award** (the Japanese equivalent of the **Nebula**) for excellence in science fiction media.

In 1977, the first YAMATO feature film (released in Japan before STAR WARS) created a bonafide cultural phenomenon—a



chain reaction erupting into the explosive "Anime Boom" of the late 1970s and early 1980s. YAMATO became to the Japanese what STAR TREK was to Americans: launching several television and feature film sequels and an unprecedented fallout of merchandizing. Hideaki Anno, the creator of NEON GENESIS EVANGELION (*Shin Seiki Evangelion*, 1995) had this to say: "If not for YAMATO, Japan might not have anime now. YAMATO started it all."

Soon this "Yamato Boom" would ripple across the Pacific and create waves of its own when it was syndicated across the US in late 1979 under the title **STAR BLAZERS**—a faithful adaptation comprised of the first series and the then-new **SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO 2** (later known as "The Quest For Iscandar" and "The Comet Empire", respectively). While **STAR BLAZERS** didn't quite take the US by storm, it was

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considered a sleeper hit, coming to the attention of several prominent science fiction media magazines (*Starlog* boldly called it "the finest sci-fi adventure on television, animated or otherwise"), while *Questar* trumpeted, "Although the show revels in the trappings of familiar space adventure, it possesses none of the limitations"). It also helped to lay the foundation for anime fandom in the US as we know it today.

In the nearly three decades since the last feature film **FINAL YAMATO** (*Uchi Senkan Yamato Kanketsu-shen*) bowed in 1983, fans in both countries have helped keep the space battleship sailing. Another "Yamato Boom" hit Japan in the late 1990s, riding a wave of nostalgia and flooding the market with merchandise of an amazing variety and quality, including several sophisticated PS2 games. Independently, both Yoshinobu Nishizaki and Leiji Matsumoto had plans to revive **YAMATO** over the years, but each became embroiled in lawsuits against the other over ownership of the property. Eventually, the court settled the matter in 2004, after which Matsumoto was awarded rights to his designs and Nishizaki was awarded rights as the creator, with Tokushisha Film Corporation as the owner and producer. **YAMATO** was revived originally by Nishizaki in 1996 (*Uchi Senkan Yamato*), and then by Nishizaki's production on the long-awaited space **BATTLESHIP YAMATO: RESURRECTION** (*Uchi Senkan Yamato Fukkaku-shen*), a theatrical feature that continues the narrative over two decades after the events in **FINAL YAMATO** (see Tim Elford's review in this issue). Before opening in Toho Cinemas on December 12, 2009, Nishizaki announced his intention to produce two sequels to finish the story begun in **RESURRECTION**.

Even while **RESURRECTION** was still playing in theaters, yet another **YAMATO** feature film was being shot under strict secrecy at Toho Studios: a live action retelling of the original "Quest for Iseandar" storyline, with an all-star cast, top-notch visual effects, and a Japanese Academy Award-winning

Award-winning

director at the helm (see Tim Eldred's review). The film opened December 1, 2010, and was a resounding box office success, with demographics revealing that the film appealed largely to middle-aged male moviegoers who grew up as part of the "Yamato Generation". It seemed that while YAMATO was still popular, the key market was well over 30. Was YAMATO a thing of the past, a relic of another time, or could it be re-envisioned for the hard-to-crack twenty-something market (most of whom were born after the original Yamato Boom)?

Following the untimely death of Yoshinobu Nishizaki in late 2010, his adopted son Shoji Nishizaki formally announced that he would continue his father's work with the commencement of an all-new remake of the original 1974 series, which had been in various stages of development for four years before the greenlight was given. Provisionally titled "New Space Battleship Yamato", the original supervising director slated for the project was one of the self-professed members of the "Yamato Generation", Hideaki Anno, whose work on the EVANGELION series and feature films is legendary. But with the production on hold for several years, Anno had to move on, and he was replaced by another member of the "Yamato Generation" who was already actively working on planning and production design: Yutaka Izubuchi, who cut his teeth as an Enemy Robot Designer on Toei's FIGHTING GENERAL DAIMOS (*Taketa Daimosai*, 1978) and FUTURE ROBO: DALTANIOUS (*Mirai Robo Dantanshusai*, 1979). In 1980, Izubuchi had worked on the series SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO III (1980), designing both the Space Battleship Arima and the Zeandora III. In the mid-1980s he began making a name

for himself on such live action programs as **SCIENCE TASK FORCE: DYNAMAN** (*Kagaku Sentai Dainaman*, 1983) and animated series such as **MOBILE SUIT ZETA GUNDAM** (*Kikaku Senshi Zeta Gundam*, 1985).

A great number of remakes fail by a mixture of vanity and shame for the source material—the quandary is, if you remove the core elements, they cease to resemble the original work, so what's the point? The vital parts that contributed to the success of the original YAMATO were the story, the characters, the production design, and the score. If any of these elements are removed or significantly altered, it ceases to have what fans have come to call the "Yamato Spirit." Izubuchi and his staff have not only strived to preserve all of these elements (and more), but to elaborate on them with the love only hardcore fans have. This is as faithful a remake as one is likely to remember, but





it also maintains its own originality. "The original was very well done, but I notice a lot of things from that time that are amusing," Izubuchi said in *Great Mechanics DX* #20. "However, because of my greater love of the work, it would be good to attach some logical reasons to them. Along the lines of plot holes or something else that is technically incorrect, I reviewed these concepts and found a way to properly improve them."

Izubuchi told *Newtype* magazine in their April 2012 issue, "The most basic elements of YAMATO are a highly complete music score and a high degree of mechanical design. On the other hand, the original went through a process of groping for the best execution of the character designs, and we now have characters that will absolutely satisfy older fans. However, even if I like it, how will YAMATO be seen by the new generation? For the sake of more recent anime fans, we approached the character designs in a way that will root them into common ground."

For YAMATO: 2199, the character designs were executed by veteran Nobuteru Yuuki, perhaps best known to older fans for his work on MEGAZONE 23 (1985). Yuuki is best known to younger Anime fans as the character designer for THE VISION OF ESCAFLOWNE (*Tenkū-no Esukafurōne*, 1996) and MAKEN-KI! (2011). In addition to his prolific anime credentials, Yuuki has created illustrations for numerous publications, as well as being a noted cover artist for Fantasy and SF novels. He has also served as a designer for such video games as *Chrono Cross* and *Solatorobo: Red the Hunter*.

While the main characters remain the same with a slight updating of their look (but still recognizable to older fans), there are a number of new characters in the cast, as well as others who originally appeared in later chapters of the original Yamato Saga, including Admiral Hijikata (Captain Gideon in the US version). Some of the new characters include a female supporting cast. As Izubuchi told *Great Mechanics DX* #20, "Rather than saying there are more female characters, 'that's not out of place' is the feeling we're going for. There were actually women seen in the boarding parade in the original. It was said that the entire female crew went [into cryogenic] sleep, except Yuki [Nova in the US version]. This was the result of cleaning up such contradictions [found in the original]."

In terms of the hardware, or as the Japanese say, "mecha", old fans can also breathe a sigh of relief as the original, classic designs have been retained, but only made more detailed. These were handled by the extremely talented Junichihiro Tamamori (SCARECROWMAN) as lead Mechanical Designer, who came to the staff's attention through his website "Yamato Mechanics" and several notable Yamato fanzines, which displayed his incredible and highly detailed drawings to bring many of the spaceships from the Yamato Saga into a plausible reality. New ships, including the Space Cruiser Murasame, were designed by Izubuchi himself (from a throwaway design in Leiji Matsumoto's original Yamato manga), and they beautifully fit in with the designs in the original. Izubuchi also handled the ships of the Gamilas (Gamilon in the US version), to hold them to a more consistent line and make them unquestionably recognizable as the war machines of these intergalactic conquerors.

Besides design, another of the most essential elements of the

Legends re-born as the classic YAMATO characters are re-imagined for the big screen, as long as they don't mess with Captain Okita's beard!



Yamato Saga is its indelible music score by the late Hiroshi Miyagawa. Incredibly, Izubuchi called in composer Akira Miyagawa, the son of the senior composer, who had assisted his father with some of the original scores. "I attended Mr. Yoshinobu Nishizaki's funeral last year, and when I looked upon his face—how can I say this—I wondered what role I had to play in Yamato's accomplishments," he told the official YAMATO: 2199 website in January 2012. "A few months later, I got a phone call from Mr. Yutaka Izubuchi about making YAMATO: 2199, and I first met him along with the rest of the staff at a hotel lobby. That was the first time I heard about the remake, and I felt that I already had a role to play in it. In fact, the people who had gathered in the lobby for that meeting all really loved the first Yamato, just like me. For better or worse, I haven't been involved with Yamato in recent years at all, so I believe I can pour fresh power and all my mind's energy into YAMATO: 2199."

Musically, they decided to re-record all of the cues written for the 1974 series, but the original scores were not to be found, so the younger Miyagawa went to the master tapes and re-scored over 70 cues by ear. These newly recorded cues have also been supplemented by several new pieces, including proper themes for the Yamato's Cosmo Falcon space fighters and the Gamilas Empire. And just when you didn't think it could get any better: legendary vocalist Isao Sasaki was tapped to record a new version of the theme song he made famous 38 years ago, while Aira Yuki (TRUE TEARS) recorded the ending theme song "In the Eternal Light of the Stars". "Honestly speaking, I'm not sure if I can surpass the first YAMATO or not," Miyagawa admits. "But I have a sense of mission that I have to achieve 'something important' that audiences will enjoy. I think we must leave this YAMATO to posterity, but we also have to leave an example of Yamato's philosophy and how to make it. We have to pass down the spirit that Yoshinobu Nishizaki and the makers of YAMATO tried to create with their whole hearts. I hope the

audience of YAMATO: 2199 will feel the Yamato spirit and spread it out. At the very least, I want them to feel sympathy toward the spirit of Yamato, and make good use of it in their own mission." Miyagawa concluded.

The spectacular animation for YAMATO: 2199—a beautiful combination of hand-drawn and CGI techniques—is being produced by Xebec Inc. (HEROIC AGE) and Anime International Company (BUBBLEGUM CRISIS OVA). It surpasses anything a fan could imagine for a remake of the original 1974 series—this author will be amazed if viewers are not completely gobsmacked when they see YAMATO: 2199 for themselves.

With production well underway, the first installment of YAMATO: 2199 bowed in Japan on April 7, 2012 (the 67th anniversary of the sinking

of the IJN Battleship Yamato during World War II) as a theatrical feature in a two-week limited release, with the subtitle "The Long Voyage" (*Harukana Tabidachi*: Episodes



1 & 2). It will be followed by "Desperate Battle in the Solar System" (*Taiyoken-no Shitto*: Episodes 3 through 6) on June 30. The subsequent five features will consist

of four half-hour episodes, each screened every two months through February 2013, in ten cinemas across Japan. All of the theatrical features are to be followed a month later by DVD and Blu-ray releases, the latter of which boasts English Subtitles. Those attending the theatrical screenings will be able to purchase limited edition exclusive versions of the DVD and Blu-ray with special bonus gifts not available through retailers. Once the last feature has been released, the series, in its episodic form, will commence broadcast on television in Japan. Now, for those of you reading and wondering, "Well, that's great, but when is this coming to the States?" Production I.G. is now actively marketing the series overseas—it's just a matter of someone biting.

Based on a viewing of the first two episodes, "The Messenger from Isejandara" and "We're Off Into a Sea of Stars", the teleplays follow the original very closely, with a variety of major and minor

ALL THE WAVE MOTION MARBLES

Space Battleship Yamato: The Motion Picture (2010)

by Tim Eldred

In hindsight, a live-action version of SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO seems like a no-brainer. But prior to its release in Japan, there was nothing inevitable about it.


The concept was first floated all the way back in 1973, when the anime series was in early development, and it persisted throughout the '80s when Producer Yoshinobu Nishizaki hinted at a project called "Yamato Live". Then there was the ill-fated option with Disney in the '90s that, thankfully, went nowhere (when the screenplay was leaked, much gnashing of teeth followed).

The closest we got in the '00s was the live-action World War II Sci-Fi film LORELEI (2005), which was storyboarded by anime auteur and Yamato superfan Hideaki Anno (NEON GENESIS EVANGELION). "Yamato Live" was dusted off and offered to LORELEI's director, Shinji Higuchi, and when he passed, another director rushed forward to volunteer: Takashi Yamazaki. Having just won Best Picture at Japan's Academy Awards for ALWAYS (2005), Yamazaki brought considerable CG experience to the table and was an obvious choice. His wife Shimako Sato, herself a filmmaker (director of EKO EKO AZARAK and screenwriter of K-20: THE FIEND WITH TWENTY FACES), got started on the script while he assembled a top-notch cast and crew. Knowing full well it would be impossible to give everyone everything they wanted (as is the case with all legacy franchises), they opted instead for a film that could stand on its own while preserving the heart of the original.

Naturally, when the movie was released in December 2010, simply titled SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO, fan reactions were mixed. The two things that *had* to be done right, the ship and the soundtrack, surpassed all expectations. Beyond that, it was mostly a matter of individual taste. The star, Takuya Kimura, was also somewhat polarizing. Think of him as Japan's answer to Justin Timberlake and you'll get the picture. Regardless, the film bowed at #1 and stayed there for a solid month, indicating a strong interest outside the fan community.


Since that time, most viewers have come to judge the live-action YAMATO on its own merits; the compromises needed to get a 26-episode story down to 138 minutes were recognized and accepted. Having seen the original series more times than I can count, my own requirements were simple: I just wanted to feel like I was seeing it again for the first time. I absolutely got that experience.

It's not like we haven't gotten alternate Yamato stories before. The first series was itself condensed into a film, and the second series was adapted from a film with significant changes. The biggest surprise of all was how the live-action movie combined the best elements of both to synthesize something entirely new. For reasons I won't divulge, it precludes any possibility of a sequel, but this was never in the cards anyway. Production began with an "all the marbles" philosophy, and in my opinion, the end product embodies that in the best way possible. Nothing was held back for later. When that fact hits you in the first scene, consider it a gift.

The live action film is currently available, with English Subtitles, on Australian DVD & Blu-ray from Madman Entertainment. 

differences which only add to overall depth of the story and characters. The first episode is almost a play-by-play re-enactment of the original, but has enough new elements and details to keep the long-time fans on the edge of their seats. The second episode is significantly different, mostly due to compressing situations from the original second and third episodes into one scenario. In the 1974 version, there's a leisurely tour of the Yamato and we meet the crew in one episode, while in the next episode the Gamillas launch a colossal missile against the ship. In the new version this is all much tighter, especially set into one episode, but there's still enough elbow room for new elements and characters. In the 1974 series, when the original staff thought that they had 39 episodes to tell their story, the first ten episodes were spent leaving the Solar System. For YAMATO: 2199, this section of the story will be moving along at a much faster pace (the first Warp Test and the firing of the Wave Motion Gun will take place in the same episode). This will give more time to expand on other elements, characters, and action.

Many members of the staff working on YAMATO: 2199 are lifelong fans of Toho's original fantasy and science fiction films. Izbuchi even worked in several elements and homages to the classic films of Ishiro Honda and Eiji Tsuburaya. A tribute to GORATH (*Yasei Garasu*, 1962) is featured in the first episode, with a song the characters sing about being space explorers (penned by Izbuchi) similar in spirit to that of the Honda film. In the audio commentary, Izbuchi also notes that the dogfight at the close of the first episode is a homage to a similar scene in RODAN (*Sora-na Daikajin Rodan*, 1957). In the second episode, there is a sound effect lifted from Tsuburaya Productions' ULTRA SEVEN (*Uruuru Seban*, 1967), which acts as the emergency klaxon for the Terrestrial Defense Force's base. Another from the same episode is the beam weapon fired from the Gamillas Carrier, which has a similar articulation and ferocity to that of the Natal beam weapons in BATTLE IN OUTER SPACE (*Uchu Daisensou*, 1959). You can bet that this is only the tip of the iceberg, and it is yet another reason to celebrate YAMATO: 2199 as perhaps the most passionate and lovingly-produced science fiction remake of one of the greatest science fiction franchises of all time.

True to form, YAMATO: 2199 is poised to introduce a whole new generation to this legendary and fantastic space opera, many of whom were not old enough (or not even born) to be a part of the YAMATO or STAR BLAZERS generations. Now, perhaps they'll come to know what all of the fuss is about. As Izbuchi said in his *Newtype* interview, "This is a new start for YAMATO. I want to raise it up for a younger generation. Although it's a revisiting for us, it is a starting point for those watching for the first time. In that way, YAMATO: 2199 will be an original for everyone. I'll be happy if you watch it with that feeling." 

Angust Ragone is the author of *Eiji Tsuburaya: Master of Monsters*, a regular columnist for *FM*, and a proud member of the "Yamato Generation". Visit his blog at www.angustragone.blogspot.com.

Special thanks to Tim Eldred for the translated interviews hosted at the official STAR BLAZERS website.





BRINGING THE LEGEND BACK TO LIFE

Space Battleship Yamato: Resurrection (2009)

by Tim Eldred

Few Sci-Fi films, anime or otherwise, had as long or as public a windup as SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO: RESURRECTION (2009). After the original Yamato saga finished in Japan with 1983's FINAL YAMATO, Executive Producer Yoshinobu Nishizaki tried to move on from his ten-year masterwork, but spent the rest of the '80s pondering ways to bring it back. This finally came to fruition in 1993 when he pieced together a story worthy of the franchise (don't you wish STAR WARS and STAR TREK had standards that high?) and called in a team of anime veterans and prodigies alike to help him make it.

Ten years had passed since FINAL YAMATO, and fan fever instantly peaked when the first new images were released to Japan's pre-internet media. The mighty battleship would rise out of its own ashes and face the deadliest threat in the universe: a moving black hole big enough to swallow the Earth whole. The human race attempts the process of emigration, but a mysterious enemy fleet begins to slaughter them in their tracks. Definitely a job for Yamato!

Unfortunately, it was a job that would take a lot longer than Nishizaki thought. A parallel anime project titled YAMATO 2520 (featuring designs by Syd Mead), first conceived in 1994, ran into major production problems that shut down Nishizaki's studio in 1997, and further legal troubles kept him from picking up the pieces for another decade. Just when all seemed lost, he returned to action and decisively announced that SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO: RESURRECTION was underway again. Despite the physical toll his ordeals had taken on him, the project took off rapidly, energizing its creator to make up for lost time. His first loyalty was to the fans that had supported him since the dark days of the mid-'70s, and he wanted to deliver a movie that would reward their patience.

YAMATO: RESURRECTION absolutely accomplished that goal, arriving in Japanese cinemas in December 2009 after it had been brought to life by many of the vets from the 1993 plan, and an even fresher group of apprentices. Taking full advantage

of cutting-edge anime technology, the film was overwhelming on the big screen, allowing many fans to see *Yamato* as intended for the first time. Those who had hitherto seen the saga only on TV screens were treated to the kind of space-opera spectacle that was previously the domain of American Sci-Fi, and even then, a domain sparsely populated.

When released on home video in Japan, it was the first Yamato film to appear on Blu-ray, making it possible to capture some of that spectacle at home. The excitement was renewed in early 2012 with the limited theatrical release of the RESURRECTION DIRECTOR'S CUT. Planned out in detail by Nishizaki, it went into production only after his untimely death in November 2010. Determined to pay their respects to him through their work, his crew outdid themselves and added a new level to an already multidimensional saga.

An English-subtitled import has yet to appear, but there is no language barrier thick enough to hide the love and devotion that fills every frame. **A**

Tim Eldred is an artist and writer working in the animation industry. He is the "Yamato Guru" of the official Star Blazers website, www.starblazers.com.



THE SPACE GIANTS ARE HERE!

THE SPACE AVENGER BATTLES THE MONSTERS FROM OUTER SPACE

BY ROY WARE



"From the far reaches of outer space comes a threat to planet Earth!"

That was the memorable opening narration I heard after school on our local UHF channel in the mid-'70s. Little did I know the excitement was only beginning, as I was able to witness one of the coolest live action television programs to ever come out of Japan. This, of course, was P-Productions' 1966 series *AMBASSADOR MAGMA* (*Maguma Taishū*), better known to American audiences as *THE SPACE GIANTS*. Week after week, kids were visually bombarded with menacing alien invaders, Godzilla-like giant monsters, and transforming robots, along with intelligent storytelling.

P-Productions was an animation and special effects studio established by manga artist and animator Torio Sagisu (pen name Shoji Ushio). Sagisu learned his craft of special effects working under the legendary Eiichi Tsuburaya of Toho Studios. Before founding P-Productions, Sagisu did film work and animation for several different studios, including Toei Animation, on projects like *MAGIC BOY* (*Shonen Sarutobi Sasuke*, 1959). P-Productions (the "P" meaning Pioneer, People, Personality, Picture, Paradise, and Public Relations) was behind many *tokusatsu* (special effects) classics such as *MONSTER PRINCE* (*Kaiju Oji*, 1967), *LION KNIGHT* (*Kaiketsu Raion Maru*, 1972), *DENJIN ZABOGA* (1974), and even the mega-popular *SPECTREMAN* (1971).

The famous manga artist Osamu Tezuka (1928-1989), known in Japan as the "God of Comics", created the original characters under the title *AMBASSADOR MAGMA*, first appearing in a 1965 issue of *Shonen Gaho* (Boys Illustrated) magazine. Along with Fuji TV and Tokyu Advertising Agency, P-Productions produced 52 episodes of *AMBASSADOR MAGMA* in 1966, thus becoming



Left: The Mura Family gets a close encounter of another kind when they meet the evil Redak! Above: The crabby Lodi (Kanix) smashes up Shinjuku, looking for a good hostess bar!

the first color *tokusatsu* TV program. The series was made at the dawn of the "Kaiju Boom", a time in Japan when a cavalcade of giant monsters began to dominate the silver screen and started to find their way to television, beginning with classics like Tsuburaya Productions' ULTRA Q (see FM 256). P-Productions went along with the trend by highlighting AMBASSADOR MAGMA with a large array of giant monsters. The program featured some of the best-looking television creatures of the '60s, from the subterranean monster Molesaurus (*Mogunesu* in Japanese), to the flying monster Birdaurus (*Badora*) and the heat monster Taron (*Aron*), to the true form of the main villain, Rodak (*Goo*). If you liked Godzilla and Gamera, then this show could not be missed.

The series was marketed to foreign territories as "Space Avenger" and was eventually picked up in North America by Lakeside Television (who originally packaged the show as "Monsters From Outer Space" in the early '70s). It finally debuted under the title THE SPACE GIANTS. The English version had topnotch dubbing, reminiscent of Titra Studio's work on many of the now cherished dubbed versions of Toho films released through American International Pictures (GODZILLA VS. THE THING) and early anime (ALAKAZAM TIE GREAT). THE SPACE GIANTS was televised across the US on local stations alongside other famous Japanese programs of the time, like ULTRAMAN, JOHNNY SOKKO AND HIS FLYING ROBOT, SPEED RACER, PRINCE PLANET, and many others.

THE SPACE GIANTS begins when a strange man descends from outer space and makes a phone call to the Mura family residence. A young boy, Miko Mura (played by Toshio Egi), answers, only to receive an unbelievable message. The extraterrestrial being tells him that at six o'clock the next morning, he and his news reporter

father, Ito Mura (Masami Okada), will be visited by the Great Rodak and taken on a trip.

The next morning, Miko wakes up and looks outside his bedroom window to find that his house is in the middle of a prehistoric jungle with pterodactyls hovering nearby. Miko and his father go outside to investigate the situation. A beautiful butterfly catches Miko's attention, and he quickly pursues it into the thick Jurassic brush. The butterfly unintentionally lures Miko face to face with a fire-breathing giant monster. Miko's father arrives in time to aid his son, only to put himself in danger as well. Out of nowhere, a massive spaceship appears and takes control of the gargantuan creature. Suddenly Miko and his father find themselves before the evil world-conqueror, Rodak. Rodak tells Ito to inform the world of his arrival (via Ito's newspaper and news wire services) and let everyone know that he plans to take over the Earth. Miko quickly snaps some photos of Rodak to have proof of their visitor before the fiend returns to his ship and into the void of space. Then, amazingly, as if nothing happened, the dinosaur-filled jungle disappears and the neighborhood goes back to normal.

Later that day, Miko tells his friends about Rodak's visit, but of course they don't believe him. Miko, desperate to prove his story, returns home and grabs his camera. But when Miko steps off his front porch to meet up with his pals, he gets a surprise by yet another visitor. A giant gold rocket lands in front of his house and transforms into a titan-like humanoid being. The towering golden "Rocket Humanoid" says he is Goldar (Tetsuya Uozumi), who has been sent to stop Rodak from taking over our planet. Goldar takes Miko and his photos to his hideout in the fiery heart of



Above: Goldar takes Kono (Gaogongan) by the horns—literally! Right: The Space Avenger is taking no sass from Noranda (Stopgon)!



Mount Olympian, where Miko meets Goldar's wife, Silver (Ranfan Oh), and their creator, a wise old wizard, Methusem (Gen Shimizu). Examining the photos, Methusem informs Miko of how serious of a threat Rodak really is. The invader travels from planet to planet and leaves them all as uninhabitable wastelands. Already, Methusem has gathered all of the power from the volcanic magma in Mount Olympian and has placed it within Goldar to give him enough strength to overcome this new danger. Aside from superior strength, Goldar possesses an arsenal of weapons, including gamma rays from his antennae, large missiles from his chest, and most importantly, the ability to transform into a high-speed super rocket!

Goldar becomes fond of Miko and the idea of fatherhood. The golden giant asks Methusem if he can give him a son of his own. Methusem grants Goldar his wish, and a new rocket-child is born. The young rocket is called Gam (Iideki Ninomiya), and he is created in Miko's image. As a reward for all of his help, Goldar gives Miko a special rocket-shaped whistle, which enables him to call any of the three members of the rocket family. He is told to blow once for Gam, twice for Silver, and three times for Goldar, if he is ever in any danger.

Gam is held aloft by his father, the Space Avenger, while Miko points the way to the local Ramen stand! Below: A Family Portrait which shows that the Nuclear Rocket Family Unit that stays evil together, stays together — Goldar, Silver, Gam, and Methusem.



In the meantime, the Earth not surrendering to him immediately frustrates Rodak, so he unleashes his first destructive monster. Rodak is stopped abruptly during his first attack when he comes face to face with Earth's new guardian, Goldar the Space Avenger, who at a moments notice will fly across the world to fight monsters that threaten to destroy mankind.

In each episode of *THE SPACE GIANTS*, you would follow Miko and Gam's adventures as they overthrown Rodak's evil plots. They would battle his henchmen, called Lugo Men (Mock Humans), who were frequently turned into a chunky, Jello-like substance when Gam shot them with his gamma rays. These scenes were not only hyper and exciting for children, but they were just pure fun. Of course they always had to call for the aid of Goldar by the end of the episode, since they usually ran into a giant monster or two that they couldn't handle on their own.

After more than 45 years, *THE SPACE GIANTS* still stands as a fan favorite for its unique cliff-hanger style and memorable monsters. Along with *ULTRAMAN* (which it beat to the airwaves by 13 days in Japan), *THE SPACE GIANTS* set a standard in children's television in the '60s when its higher budget allowed kids to see fantastic things on a weekly basis that were previously only visualized through animation. This was the beginning of the hero-versus-giant-monster trend that stayed strong through the '70s. Unfortunately, *THE SPACE GIANTS* has yet to see an official DVD release in North America. But it did get a reboot in 1993 as a 13-part OAV (Original Animation Video) series. This animated version had a fresh, contemporary look, and introduced Tezuka's story to a brand new audience. Still, no matter how much they try to update *THE SPACE GIANTS*, it will never replace the good ol' days when giant monsters ran rampant across television screens on both sides of the Pacific. 🌌

AMBASSADOR MAGMA: THE MANGA

BY BOB WAME



Osamu Tezuka's original *AMBASSADOR MAGMA* manga, first appearing in the Japanese monthly *Shonen Gaho* in 1965, is beautifully illustrated with stunning action scenes and attractive character designs. The first few chapters of the manga are pretty much identical to the origin story in the live action version. Story arcs in the manga chapters that follow are only lightly touched upon in the TV show (except for a dramatic story wherein Miko's mother, Tomoko, is abducted by

Goa and replaced by an alien imposter). In one of the last stories of the manga, Tezuka reintroduces *Majin Garon*, a character originally from his 1959 story of the same name. *Majin Garon* was a giant robot sent by aliens to destroy Earth. Things are foiled when a young boy, Pic, gets inside the cockpit in Garon's chest, and the two unite to fight for the good of mankind. In *AMBASSADOR MAGMA*, Goa kidnaps Pic and sends Garon out to defeat Magma. Eventually, Pic is saved and reunites with Garon, which stops Garon's mad path of destruction. This story was similar to episodes 23 and 24 of the TV show, with the monster Norunda (*Sloggon*), standing in for Garon. In the respective stories, Magma shatters the bodies of both of these enemies in an attempt to destroy them, but he discovers that the fragments gather together and reform, restoring them to their original state. Magma finds that he must remove Norunda's heart to defeat him, but with Garon, by returning Pic, he has given him back his heart. Before *AMBASSADOR MAGMA*, the popular *Majin Garon* also appeared in the manga version of *ASTRO BOY*. 🌌

マジン大使



GODZILLA VS. GAMERA

CHALLENGES IN THE KAIJU EIGA DURING THE SECOND MONSTER BOOM

BY MATT FRANK

Chances are, if you're reading a magazine like FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND, you're something of a monster fan. If you're a monster fan, chances are you're familiar with the "Big Bads"—the top tier talent in the world of teeth-gnashing nasties—so names like "Godzilla" and "Gamera" are definitely in your personal lexicon of pop-culture trivia. Likely, then, that you know the basic gist of who ranks above whom: Godzilla is *King of the Monsters*, and Gamera is... well, he's the dancing turtle that shot flames out of his butt. However, lest we forget, it was Gamera who once posed the greatest threat to the mighty Godzilla's throne. It was Gamera who came out of nowhere and nearly knocked the King from his perch... and, in some small way, helped him reclaim that title. What happened? How do the '90s Godzilla films compare to the '90s Gamera films? Why was one a reliable financial success while the other was held higher from a critical perspective? Let's take a gander, oh weary traveler.

We all know who Godzilla is. He's the one. The "king of kings", as it were. But what about Gamera? Starring in a series of films from 1965 (during the Golden Age of the Monster Boom) to 1980, he was, in a nutshell, Daijic Studio's answer to Toho Studio's Monster Monarch, and for a time, he was king of putting-rear ends in seats at the picture show. Gamera films were kicking scaly tail and making it look easy, thanks to their more kid-friendly scenarios than Toho's general-audience targeted features from the House of Godzilla. Noriaki Yuasa was the director behind most of the Gamera madness, and his penchant for making Gamera films accessible to younger kids may have been what inspired Toho to do the same.

However, Gamera films were not enjoying the respectability and reception that Godzilla's films did. The Colossal Chelonian's movies were riddled with what many considered to be frustratingly juvenile scripts, and the effects boomed wildly between breathtaking (GAMERA VS. BARUGON) and outright embarrassing (GAMERA VS. GIJRON). Like most stars of the Japanese movie system, however, both Godzilla and Gamera had to hew out for a good while in the late '70s due to dropping ticket sales. Gamera got another chance at the spotlight with GAMERA: SUPER MONSTER in 1980, but the blatant use of stock footage and a plot that would make you slant your head

against a desk didn't do much to help Gamera's reputation. The films were especially infamous in the US as being weird, cheap, and "so bad they're good." Needless to say, it would be another 15 years before Gamera would get his second round in the ring. In 1984, Toho saw fit to revive their Saurian Stomper with THE RETURN OF GODZILLA. In the following years, there was GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE (1989), GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH (1991), GODZILLA AND MOTHIRA: BATTLE FOR THE EARTH (1992), GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA 2 (1993), GODZILLA VS. SPACE GODZILLA (1994), and finally GODZILLA VS. DESTROYAH (1995). Note that there were five Godzilla films in five years, and seven films total in a 16-year period. These Godzilla films of the '80s and '90s, while loved by many fans, are often criticized for lacking the magic and imagination of the Honda-era Toho spectacles. True, they're colorful and have no shortage of monsterific clashes and mass destruction—not to mention their box office strength. However, some are quick to point out that these films were starting to re-tread old ground. KING GHIDORAH hits a lot of the same story beats and imagery as MONSTER ZERO (1965) without the charm of the latter. BATTLE FOR THE EARTH feels a lot like a remake of MOTHIRA (1961) with Godzilla and the vicious Battra thrown in as almost a pair of afterthoughts. Nevertheless, these films positively dominated ticket sales, with Godzilla and Mothra's rematch being the most popular of them all (a 20 million gross and 4.2 million seats sold).

The same year as the heavily promoted GODZILLA VS. DESTROYAH, Daijic brought the Terrible Terrapin out of retirement for 1993's GAMERA: GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE. Many fans and critics hold the Gamera Trilogy higher than almost the entirety of the Heisei Godzilla series (1984-1995), despite their stronger affection for the Monster King over the Friend of Children. Even on a smaller budget, the trilogy is considered to have better scripts, better effects, and a tighter continuity than Godzilla's expensive blockbusters.

So, what was the deal? Well, we have to look at this from Toho's perspective: Godzilla was brought back to life in THE RETURN OF GODZILLA, which also enjoyed an American theatrical release as GODZILLA 1985, with new scenes featuring good



Left: The original Japanese movie poster for **GODZILLA VS. MEGAGIRUS** (2000).
 Right: The original advertising art for **GAMERA: GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE** (1995).



of Raymond Burr. The film performed decently, and is usually praised by fans for having the best use of atmosphere in the Godzilla franchise since the original 1954 film. Toho saw fit to make a sequel, though they definitely took their time—it wasn't until 1989 that **GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE** saw release. But here's a film that *kaiju* fans also adore, thanks to a unique story, smart script, great acting and downright delicious special effects due to the handiwork of Koichi Kawakita. The Biollante monster effects alone would have sent Stan Winston away with his head spinning.

Opening night positively **PACKED** theaters. But afterwards? Barely a peep. **BIOLLANTE** greatly under-performed at only 7 million in sales (compared to **RETURN**'s 11 million), and even Kawakita felt the burn. One possible answer for the drop is simply that nobody knew who this upstart Biollante was. Even though the fans came out in droves on opening night, nobody else seemed to care. "What's this? Godzilla versus a giant plant? Where's Ghidorah? Where's Mothra? Where's Meechagodzilla?" It's entirely possible that it was also bad word-of-mouth that hurt the film's performance (after all, it's a very unconventional Godzilla film). Regardless, the film's failure made for a more gun-shy Toho.

What we see here is an early example of studio reliance on brand recognition, which basically means that audiences respond more favorably to recognizable imagery, characters, and brands than

they do to original concepts, especially in an age where the public is increasingly bombarded with more and more entertainment sources. Toho saw an opportunity to re-introduce Godzilla to a new generation of moviegoers with ramped-up effects and give him brand new beasts to compete against that would reflect contemporary sensibilities. Unfortunately, audiences didn't seem to want that. They wanted the classics, the old guard, the great *daikaiju* of the '60s and '70s. So Toho, a company steeped in tradition and an old-school studio system, was in something of a bind; in order to turn a profit with these rather expensive films, they needed to start catering to an audience that was hungry for nostalgia, as opposed to the '60s, when folks were thrilled to see almost anything on the silver screen. So, the word for the '90s Godzilla films was "safe," in that they had to play these films a little closer to the chest in order to make everyone happy—the executives, the producers, the audiences, the theaters, and so on.

It's a tragic example of a studio with so much money and marketing behind a franchise that ultimately the marketing starts coming before the actual films. One can most certainly see examples in more recent films, such as J.J. Abrams' **STAR TREK** reboot. This is a franchise that's long been celebrated as being smarter, slower—high on philosophy and low on action. However, after the lukewarm reception to **ENTERPRISE** (2001) and the universal disdain for the later **NEXT GENERATION** films, the studio decided

ゴジラ VS モスラ

GODZILLA vs MOSU

極彩色の大決戦！



to play it safe and create a cinematic experience that was practically bursting at the seams with spicy action, dazzling effects, bombastic performances, and appeal to the broadest audience possible without collapsing into lowest-common-denominator territory. The intelligence and moral quandaries of the classic *STAR TREK* were now considered a risk factor, and the studio's hand was forced. Similarly, new monsters and overly complicated plots were considered a budget risk for Toho's proudest franchise.

But what about Gamera? How did a schlocky little fire-farting turtle make such darned good flicks?

Originally planned as a short, cheap, kid-friendly matinee, 1995's *GAMERA: GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE* (titled in Japan as *GAMERA: GIANT MONSTER DOGFIGHT*) was saved by the daring creative team of director Shusuke Kaneko, special effects guru Shinji Higuchi (later known for his work on *NEON GENESIS EVANGELION*), and writer Kazunori Ito (writer of the well-loved *GHOST IN THE SHELL* motion picture). These *kaiju*-fans-turned-professionals saw an opportunity to pay homage to the truly classic staying power of the Toho '60s-era special effects films. It was films like *MOTHRA VS. GODZILLA* (1964), *THE MYSTERIANS* (1957) and *THE WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS* (1966) that truly lit Kaneko's flame, and it was that old black magic that he sought to recapture, if not in his own *Godzilla* movie, then at least with *Gamera*.

In a nutshell, the '90s *Gamera* Trilogy encapsulates everything about the *kaiju* genre that has made it unique among other sci-fi and fantasy films, not to mention the aspects that made monster fans fall in love with the films in the first place. The first film, *GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE*, is a no-holds-barred, knock-down, drag-out slugfest. It's got scary moments, funny moments, exciting moments, and some wiz-bang eye candy. One could compare it to the monster rumbles of the '60s like *GHIDRAH, THE THREE-HEADED MONSTER* (1964) in its sheer joyful entertainment value. The second film, unleashed in 1996, is *GAMERA 2: ATTACK OF THE LEGION*. This film went for a harder science-fiction approach, and excels at that oft-missed bullseye of tricking the audience into believing that what's happening could be plausible in some form. Finally, 1999 saw the release of *GAMERA 3: THE REVENGE OF IRIS*. Lauded by critics and fans alike, this is heavily considered to be Kaneko's finest film, an excellent combination of drama and apocalyptic imagery, with perhaps the most convincing giant monster city battles to date. It was for this film that fans were literally chanting Gamera's name in the street and multiple awards, accolades, and outright praise were heaped upon the Gamera team. When *GAMERA 3* popped out and smacked the fans across the head, even vocal Gamera haters had to take a step back. Did Gamera do the impossible? Did he knock the King from his throne?

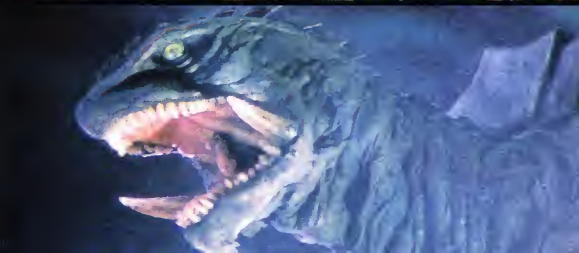
Part of the answer lies in the inception of the new

謎の第3惑星があらつる すごい威力の大悪獣



ガメラ対大悪獣ギラ

製作 永田秀雅 監督 湯浅憲明 脚本 高橋二三 撮影 菅多崎晃
特撮 藤井和文



Gamera series. It was never planned as a trilogy. The low-budget, low-ambition concept for what was to become **GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE** was Daiei simply not wanting to get their hands dirty. They had no grand plan for a revival, just a little cheap-jack production, and just enough to earn money from the “bedraggled parents paying for their screaming kids to see a movie” audience. Again, the resulting film was thanks to Kaneko, who came in and said, “No. We’re not doing that.”

It’s not unreasonable to assume that **THE RETURN OF GODZILLA** was part of Kaneko’s pitch—that if a darker, serious Godzilla had succeeded at the box office, why couldn’t they do the same with Gamera? He’d still be a hero, but he doesn’t have to do gymnastics or play his theme song with a rock and fish bones. Because this was a potentially profitable venture, and because there wasn’t as much money at stake as there was at Toho, the new Gamera team was essentially cut loose—but they had to work within their limitations. Art through adversity. A lot of it also fell onto the shoulders of Shinji Higuchi, who created absolutely groundbreaking special effects for the Gamera trilogy, filming from creative angles, using daring imagery, and generally taking more risks. They knew they had to make the best use of every one of their resources if the film was going to succeed at all.

Yet, as beloved as the Gamera trilogy is, and as ready as fans are to declare them to be superior to the Heisei Godzilla films, they were only modest box-office fare, whereas the Heisei Godzilla films reigned supreme. The explanation is that... well, Godzilla is King of the

Monsters! Honestly, there’s no other monster franchise as prolific and popular as the mighty *Gojira*. And as middle-of-the-road as the Heisei Godzilla films have been accused of being in recent years, they’re not *bad* films. They met audience expectations, dazzled them with atomic-ray light shows, satisfied their craving for monster action, and had generally good acting and easy-to-follow plots, not to mention that they started bringing back the classic monsters. Toho had a good thing going.

Gamera is another beast entirely. The franchise ended on a painful whimper in 1980, and didn’t

have the best reputation outside of the kids who grew up with the movies as throwaway matinees. The

Original Mutant Turtle was always considered second-fiddle to the Big G, and his rep across the US was a downright laughing stock thanks to *Mystery Science Theater 3000*’s riffing on the painful Sandy Frank dub jobs. So to see an outright high-quality Gamera film made him a cult hit and fan-favorite, but the fact that he wasn’t Godzilla, that perhaps this was “just another monster movie” may have contributed to audience indifference at the time. Still, the films didn’t bomb—there was enough nostalgia-driven desire to revisit the wild and wooly Gamera matinees of yore that drove enough people to the theater to warrant three films. **GUARDIAN OF THE**



Above: The original Japanese poster for GAMERA 3: THE AWAKENING OF IRYS (1999). Opposite: Top & Middle, two staged photos from GAMERA: GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE (1995). Bottom, GAMERA 3. Notice the change in Gamera's appearance from the 1995 film?

UNIVERSE earned a paltry 6 million, but was only made for 4.5 million. Those numbers can't compare to Toho's, but they still earned a profit.

Let's not kid ourselves here—Toho is a big company filled with



**Above: GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE
(1989). Below: GML: GIANT
MONSTERS ALL-OUT ATTACK
(2001).**

a lot of smart, business-savvy people, and the reaction to the Gamera trilogy didn't fly under their radar. After the fan outcry following the 1998 American-made GODZILLA, Toho tried to win back some favor by rushing out GODZILLA 2000 (1999). It performed modestly, enough to warrant GODZILLA VS.

MEGAGUIRUS (2000), which performed... not so well. Part of Toho's new business plan was to create a handful of reboots, each one presenting a unique vision for the Godzilla universe, then pick a direction depending on which was the most

successful. However, the general lukewarm reception was hurting the franchise, and lo and behold, guess who was given the director's chair for the third film? Shusuke Kaneko.

Kaneko's finalized plan involved the revival of a huge, furious, raging Godzilla, blinded by hatred for the nation that had forgotten what it meant to feel fear. With the military more or less ineffectual, the main cast had to unravel the legend of the *Guardians of Yamato*, three beasts that would rise and defend Japan alongside its human



Above & Below: GAMERA 3: THE AWAKENING OF IRYs (1999).

protectors. Kaneko originally intended for the three monsters to be culled from the lower ranks of Toho's monster bestiary—Anguirus (GODZILLA RAIDS AGAIN), Baragon (FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD), and Varan (VARAN, THE UNBELIEVABLE). Each creature would more or less resemble their classic incarnations, but would be re-cast and re-imagined in order to serve the purposes of the plot. It was here that Toho saw fit to step in—they approved the plot, but noted that, in all honesty, only the most diehard of Godzilla fans would recognize these characters. Classic *kaiju* moneymakers Mothra and King Ghidorah were ordered in the place of at least two of the leading monsters. Kaneko got to keep one, being Baragon, and cameras rolled.

GODZILLA, MOTHRA, AND KING GHIDORAH: GIANT MONSTERS ALL-OUT ATTACK (aka GMK) struck in 2001, and it was the most financially successful, critically acclaimed, and fan-beloved of all the "Millennium" Godzilla movies, grossing 20 million in sales and selling 2.4 million tickets (doubling MEGAGUIRUS's returns from the previous year). Some would argue that the film's success was mostly due to GMK's rather bizarre pairing with the anime short HAMTARO:





Matt Frank's own humorous match-up of Godzilla and Gamera literally going nose to nose. Will Godzilla win? Or Gamera? In the end, it's we, the audience who wins, right?

ADVENTURES IN HAM-HAM LAND, but it stands to reason that more people were paying full ticket price to see Godzilla go at it with King Ghidorah and Mothra, not just leave after the colorful hamster craziness was over. Regardless, the film competed against HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE, and though it never truly threatened the pop-culture juggernaut of the Potter franchise, it held its ground long enough to warrant at least three more Godzilla films.

Thanks to the directorial clout of Kaneko and the business-minded Toho Studios, GMK put Godzilla back on top, if only for a short while. Heck, the film is so popular among fans that there's an entire fandom subset that constantly claims it's overrated. THAT'S the pinnacle of popularity, right there. Many fans also complain that Toho's "meddling" ultimately degraded the film by recasting King Ghidorah as a "good guy," but it's hard to see their point when the film was originally going to recast Varan, a vicious and violent creature from his own film, in the same role—not to mention that Ghidorah himself never had much in the way of personality or motivation other than "break everything and kill everyone." The simple fact is that this film wouldn't have been able to turn around

the numbers it did without Toho's insistence on using the audience-attracting characters, and Kaneko's sensibilities as a filmmaker was the icing on the cake.

For whatever reason, Kaneko didn't return for the subsequent three Godzilla films. Word is that it was because he felt that he already made his Godzilla film, and he was comfortable moving on to other projects. Still, it was a decent mix of quality filmmaking learned from Gamera as well as smart corporate planning that helped Godzilla stick around for a bit longer. It serves to show that at the end of the day, these are films about people. People who want to make art. People who need to turn a profit. And people who are trying to not get stepped on—or vaporized. Or eaten. Or caught under a falling, flaming Toyota.

Matt Frank is an artist and writer for comics, including IDW's *Godzilla* series and Fun Publications' *Transformers: Collectors Club*. He won the Best of Austin 2011 award for "Kaju King" in honor of his work on the *Godzilla: Kingdom of Monsters* store-stomping cover promotion. He thanks both August Ragone and Jared Faust for their fact-checking help on this article. Matt's work can be found at www.mattfrankart.com. **N**



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GODZILLA'S GOT ISSUES

by Holly Interlandi



Comic books have made room for all kinds of monsters over the years—undead zombies, the Demogorge, Vampirella, King Shark, barnfs. But as far as contested comic properties go, Godzilla is one of the kings, having gone through many incarnations—from Japanese manga movie adaptations to Marvel adventures with the Avengers to black and white reprints at Dark Horse. And who can blame the comics industry for wanting a piece of the action? Godzilla is fantastical, larger than life, and somewhat of a reptilian superhero.

He is now muscling his way through the pages of IDW, who own a score of monstrous properties, including the 30 DAYS OF NIGHT vamps and TRANSFORMERS autobots. IDW fought long and hard for Godzilla, finally acquiring him in 2010—albeit not without strict supervision from his Japanese owners. “Everything, from story proposals to final script to pencils and colors goes through Toho for approval,” says editor Bobby Cumow. “We don’t have any directives, but everything must meet Toho standards and keep with established Godzilla lore... We have to keep the story origins of the monsters the same as they are in the movies, so a lot of the terminology and cultural references are kept intact because of that.”

This helps to emphasize the most satisfying thing about IDW’s current titles—all of them, including John Layman’s yakuza-tinted GANGSTERS AND GOLIATHS: they don’t feel the least bit gimmicky. Sure, there are giant monsters, but the daikaiju somehow find a home in the plot beyond sensationalism,

and there are sympathetic human characters in the mix. That is to say that the comics are following the very successful Toho film formula by introducing monsters through the more relatable eyes of regular people.

And regular people sure seem to have a lot to say about Godzilla. “We get pitches from creators who are already big fans of the property,” says Cumow. So far, this has included everyone from the previously mentioned John Layman (Image’s CHEW) and artist Alberto Ponticelli (DC’s FRANKENSTEIN: AGENT OF S.H.A.D.E.) to writer/artist Eric Powell (Dark Horse Comics’ THE GOON).

Regardless of his Japanese origins, Godzilla’s influence seems to be multicultural. “Thus far, we’ve taken a fairly global scope,” Cumow explains. He isn’t kidding: in GODZILLA: KINGDOM OF MONSTERS, Godzilla rampages America while Rodan flies across Germany and Battra cocoons up on the Eiffel Tower. It allows humorists like Eric Powell to capitalize on not-so-subtle cultural jokes and lighten up the atmosphere with political satire (“Stupid Americans!”).

One might say, however, that a hero is only as effective as his villains, and although Godzilla’s reputation can only debatably be considered heroic (except in the loosest “main character” sense of the term), he has certainly had an impressive roster of rivals. To ignore them would be to diminish his impact, and IDW has accordingly acquired the property rights to a legion of monsters to accompany Godzilla on his journey across the panels of comic-dom, including Mechagodzilla, Anguirus, Rodan, Battra, King Ghidorah, Mothra, and even

Hedorah the Smog Monster. Cumow explains that this is what sets IDW’s comics apart from Godzilla’s previous incarnations in the comic book realm: “With so many Toho monsters at our disposal, we’re able to incorporate much more of what makes Godzilla *Godzilla*, which namely are his memorable adversaries. We currently have about a dozen monsters we can work with.”

In the wake of GODZILLA: LEGENDS, a mini-series focused on Godzilla doing battle with one signature kaiju per issue, IDW are launching a new ongoing entitled simply GODZILLA, written by Duane Swierczynski (DC’s BIRDS OF PREY) and pencilled by Simon Gane (Vertigo’s NORTHLANDERS), which promises to be both episodic and cinematic in scope. “This is essentially the Moby Dick of Godzilla stories, focusing on one man’s quest—or ‘obsession’ might be more appropriate—to take down giant monsters,” Cumow explains. “However, our hero, assembles a band of monster hunters, and each has a specialized skill which helps in their fight.” Talk about a tried-and-true storytelling trope. It’s a hero team-up, kaiji-style, and it’s coming to a local comic book store near you.

Such a famous monster must be given his due in every medium, and it appears that everything has been properly established in IDW’s Godzilla comics—from monster origins and character designs to Godzilla’s signature (and trademarked!) roar, reprinted on panel as “SKREEE-ONK”. Say that one out loud. It sounds fairly perfect—proving IDW’s dedication to remaining faithful to every architecture-demolishing detail. **N**

SPECTREMAN

P-PRODUCTIONS GOLDEN HOMERUN HERO!

BY EDWARD E. HOLLAND



During the period of "Enlightened Peace" of the 1970s, P-Productions ensured the biggest bang from their undervalued yen, utilizing shoestring budgets and deep pockets of talent and to solidly return to the arena of entertainment during a crucial time in the history of Japan.

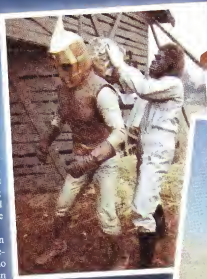
Upon the fallout of the turbulent '60s while advancing towards the explosive '70s, Tomio Sagisu, P-Productions' Founder and President, aimed a direct slider at the void in *tokusatsu* programming left in the wake of Eiji Tsuburaya's ULTRA SEVEN sign-off in 1968. Sagisu, who had a previous *tokusatsu* hit with THE SPACE GIANTS (*Meguma Taishi*), called the plays that put P-Productions back on the map by collecting big name artisans and production assistants into a brand new team, which led to stealing the first base of the viewing public.

Their 1970 pilot, entitled "Superhuman Elementman" (*Chejin Erementoman*) featured a pre-Spectreman hero and the Space Simian Gori, who ended up being the character Ra (known as "Karas" in the US version) in SPECTREMAN. The eight-minute pilot, costing 800,000 yen (approximately \$12,200 USD) tested well enough that network suits poured more cash into the mysterious, brooding series SPACE SIMIAN GORI (*Uchu Enjin Gori*), leading to a grand slam that ignited the fuse of Japan's second *Kaiju Boom*!

This first incarnation of SPECTREMAN, SPACE SIMIAN GORI, was launched three months prior to TBS's premiere of RETURN OF ULTRAMAN (*Kaettekita Urutoraman*), four months before the dawn of Toei's KAMEN RIDER (*Kamen Raida* or "Masked Rider"), and six months before the resurgence of Toho's King of Monsters in GODZILLA VS. HEDORAH (*Gofira tai Hedora*). Interestingly, Hedohar was designed by the late, great Yasuyuki Inoue (1923-2012), who served as the art director on many of Toho's monster masterpieces and worked in the same capacity on SPECTREMAN and its predecessors.

On January 2nd, 1971, GORI's premiere episode "Gori Targets the Earth!" advanced its message of disgust with rapid, unrestricted industrialization by depicting local and national protests against harmful byproducts caused by out of control factories. The story goes that 40,000 light years from Earth, near the Constellation of Sagittarius, Dr. Gori—an autocratic doctor, genius scientist, and exile from the Planet E—escapes (with the aid of his gorilla army warrior Ra) just before the High Council of Elders are to erase and reprogram his malcontent mind. After floating in space, they stumble upon our planet. Targeting the Earth with an environmental pollution strategy, Dr. Gori creates the deadly monsters Hedohar and Gokinosaurs; and all the while, real-life social problems of mercury-poisoned waterways, photochemical asthma-inducing smog, and various industrial accidents plagued Japan.

An Automated Planet, Nebula 71, receives word of Gori and Ra's plan to conquer the Earth and dispatch their cybernetic agent, Spectreman, to combat the dirty simian duo. Assuming the identity of a mild-mannered Japanese citizen, Spectreman becomes Joji Gamou and joins the "Pollution G-Men", a special investigation unit of the Environmental Pollution Department based in Tokyo. This part was played by Tetsuo Narikawa, a Toho "New Faces"



Left: Apeman shall kill Spectreman! Right: Dr. Gori's muscle, Ra!



winner, in his first starring role. Narikawa believed that the ratings champion, STAR OF THE GIANTS (*Kyojin-no Hoshi*), a sports anime running in the same timeslot, was so popular that nothing could challenge its dominance. Narikawa confided, "We will not beat that program, but towards the end of the first period, we reached the same rating, and we overtook the show and extended another year because of our high ratings."

Leading the Pollution G-Men was the stiff upper-lipped Chief Kurata, played by Tohru Ohira (the original voice and suit actor for Rodak in THE SPACE GIANTS). Filling out the G-Men were Koji Okazaki as Toshio Arito, Nobuyoshi Kaga, and Takashi Ota. Together the team confronts Dr. Gori's invasion of Earth and drives his pollution armies out of countryside and suburban areas, providing assistance to affected communities and sometimes even helping bury the hapless victims.

To add female appeal, the show featured four vastly different heroines. The first and most popular was Rie Endo, played by Machiko Konishi, all dolled up in her light, red, patent leather pantsuit. Endo was the direct object of Ra's female infatuation, getting him into trouble with the overbearing Dr. Gori. The other lovely ladies of the Pollution G-Men included Naoko "Yoko" Shin as Mineko Tachibana (Episodes 19-35), Rumi Goto as Midori Sawa (Episodes 36-39), and last, but not least, Hiromi Yanagida, played by Taeko Sakurai (Episodes 40-63).

However, no one would disagree that Koji Uenishi (suit actor from ULTRA SEVEN) was the most passionate and worked the hardest on series, playing both Spectreman and Ra (as well as guest starring roles sans mask). During field trips to the Tokyo's Ueno Zoo, he observed gorillas' movements, developing their

SPECTREMAN'S SEVEN SIGNATURE MOVES



NEBULA SLICE

EXPANDS WHILE FLYING AND IS USED FOR SLICING AND DICING THE BAD GUYS, LIKE A GIANT SHURIKEN



SPECTRE CHOP

ONE OF SPECTREMAN'S GO-TO MOVES TO BRING DOWN HIS FOES



NEBULA GIMLET

ANOTHER POWERFUL WEAPON ATTACHMENT FOR DISPATCHING THE BADDIES



SPECTRE FLASH

A BOLT OF POWER SURGES FROM SPECTREMAN'S FINGERTIPS



SPECTRE CUTTERS

BLADES THAT BURST FORTH FROM HIS FOREARMS A LA WOLVERINE



SPECTRE KICK

KICKIN' IT LIKE KUNG FU, SPECTREMAN WAS ALWAYS COMFORTABLE PUTTING HIS BOOT UPSIDE AN ENEMY'S HEAD



SPECTRE THUNDER

A SHOCKWAVE BLAST OF ENERGY



mannerisms into the character Ra. He was overjoyed with the part, and zealously provided Ra's voiceovers as well.

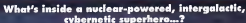
Masterminding his plots from his self-made spaceship, Dr. Gori devised the destruction of Earth from his greatest invention, the Almighty Chair. This voicing and self-declared Ruler of the Universe was played by Takanobu Toya, who also was featured in Jun Fukuda's *GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA* (*Gofira tai Mekagofira*, 1974), playing—wait for it—an interstellar ape!

No tokusatsu series is complete without music, and this one was backed by infectious theme songs from Kunio Miyauchi, also credited with the incredible scores for Tsuburaya Productions' *ULTRA Q* (*Urutora Kyu*, 1966) and *ULTRAMAN* (*Uratorman*, 1966). Classical and choral composer Naohiko Terashima penned the background score for the series—his sole television credit.

SPACE SIMIAN GORI went through two additional phases, *SPACE SIMIAN GORI VS. SPECTREMAN* (Episodes 21-39) and finally *SPECTREMAN* (Episodes 40-63). During the midpoint of the series they digressed from pollution beasts and added unique monsters and spacemen to the lineup, such as *Mitsukubi Ryu* (Three-Headed Dragon). The visionary surrealist Ryosaku Takayama (1917-1982) brought all of the creatures great and small in *SPECTREMAN* to life. Dubbed the *Father*

Top left: Solar Mask! Top right: Spectreman puts the clasp on Rah! Above: Dr. Gori gives Rah the low down on his new ApoPed!

SPECTREMAN's fans are legion. Director Hideaki Anno



Even prior to 20th Century Fox's *ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES*, P-Productions unleashed an alternative simian sci-fi line drive on an unsuspecting, kaiju-starved nation, and the 63 episodes in their entirety are still heavy hitters, entertaining fans around the globe, and possibly beings beyond our home field of imagination.

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SPECTREMAN'S MONSTER EPISODE GUIDE

- 1. Hedoron: Episode 1 "Gori Targets the Earth" & Episode 2 "Destroy the Pollution Monster Hedoron!"
- 2. Zeron: Episode 4 "Rah, Scour the Earth"
- 3. Gokinosaurs: Episode 7 "The Black Terror" & Episode 8 "Duel!! Gokinosaurs"
- 4. Nezubirdon: Episode 9 "The Terror of Nezubirdon" & Episode 10 "Stop the Monster Train!!"
- 5. Neo-Hedoron: Episodes 13 & 14 "Hedoron Strikes Back"
- 6. Mogunetodon: Episode 15 "Massive Earthquake Levels Tokyo!" & Episode 16 "The Retaliation of Mogunetodon!"
- 7. Thunder-Gei: Episode 17 "Thunder-Gei: The Flying Whale" & Episode 18 "Infiltrate Monster Island!!"
- 8. Zumeo: Episode 21 "The Mysterious Alien Zumeo vs. Gilgind" & Episode 22 "Violent Charge of the Dual-Bladed Monster Gilgind!"
- 9. Baronsaurus: Episode 22 "Traffic Accident Monster Kuruma-Nikuras!!" & Episode 23 "Danger!! Kuruma-Nikuras"
- 10. Kuruma-Nikuras: Episode 22 "Traffic Accident Monster Kuruma-Nikuras!!" & Episode 23 "Danger!! Kuruma-Nikuras"
- 11. Spincobra: Episode 30 "Terror Comes Ashore: Monster Tag- Match!!" & Episode 31 "Protect the Lighthouse!"
- 12. Sariganido: Episode 30 "Terror Comes Ashore: Monster Tag- Match!!" & Episode 31 "Protect the Lighthouse!"
- 13. Satan King: Episode 25 "Grand Dual Operation: Magulah & Satan-King!!" & Episode 26 "Two Giant Monsters Battle in Tokyo!!"
- 14. Silver Robo aka Monster X: Episode 27 "Titanic Battle!! Seven Giant Monsters"
- 15. Spider Monster: Episode 39 "Operation: Break into the Monster-Zone!!"
- 16. Magma: Episode 40 "The Grass Whistling Monster" & Episode 41 "Vapor Monster Dies at Dawn!"
- 17. Tengudon: Episode 42 "Solar Mask Arrives from Space"

AN ODE TO **VARAN** THE UNBELIEVABLE THE LOST KAIJU WE'LL NEVER FORGET

by Bob Eggleton

VARAN, THE UNBELIEVABLE (*Daikaiju Baran*) has a special spot with many *kaiju* *eiga* aficionados. He was only ever seen in one film—his 1958 debut—and as a fleeting guest appearance in the 1968 all-star opus *DESTROY ALL MONSTERS*. What happened to this monster? And what happened to his one and only starring vehicle?

The origin of VARAN actually starts in the US. It was initially commissioned by AB-PT Pictures (a joint film and television company founded by the American Broadcast Company and Paramount Theaters) from Toho Studios for an all-in-one theatrical-television distribution in North America. The controversial AB-PT had previously produced several such films, such as Bert I. Gordon's *BEGINNING OF THE END* (1957) and Boris Petroff's *THE UNEARTHLY* (1957). AB-PT announced the production as "Baran, Monster of the East", but for reasons unclear, they backed out of the production at the eleventh hour. Toho, which was well into shooting color genre films at this point, went ahead with *DAIKAIJU BARAN* as a black and white production—per AB-PT's original deal (and due to budget restraints caused by picking up the tab from the former American investors). Ishiro Honda was tapped to direct, Eiji Tsuburaya to helm the visual effects, and Akira Ifukube to pen the score, with a screenplay by Shinichi Sekizawa from an original story by mystery & science fiction writer Ken Kurokuma (*RODAN*). Following *Godzilla*, *Anguirus*, and *Rodan*, this would be Toho's fourth such type of prehistoric *kaiju*.

The story of VARAN begins thus: entomologists decide to penetrate the "forbidden" lake area of a remote, northern area of Japan to investigate reports of an extremely rare and elusive butterfly. This is done against the warnings of the elders of the local village, who warn of the area—especially a rather misty

lake—being sacred. In a moody and foreboding scene, terrifying noises are heard, a giant shadow looms, and a landslide occurs and kills the transgressors.

This event piques the interest of a reporter and another entomologist. Soon, they find that a giant monster, "Baran"—a

spiked prehistoric dragon—lives in the lake. Soon after, Baran destroys the village and then heads for Tokyo by unexpectedly sprouting wing-flaps (between its front and rear limbs, much like a flying squirrel), and landing in the sea near the mouth of Tokyo Bay. After engaging the Japanese Self Defense Forces, Varan lands at Haneda Airport and goes on a rampage. Varan is seemingly unstoppable until he meets with a truck loaded with a highly volatile explosive, from which he recovers, and

only enrages him further. In a last ditch effort, the monster is baited into swallowing a series of flares loaded with the explosive, causing the creature to retreat into the depths of Tokyo Bay, and presumably, its end—hopefully to never bother Japan again.

Legendary monster suit actor Haruo Nakajima ("The Man of a Thousand Monsters", FM 256) plays the title creature, which can both stand like a bipedal dinosaur as well as travel on all fours. Unlike *Godzilla* and *Rodan* before him, Baran is amazingly spiked and armored on his head and back with an unbelievably long tail, but is rather simple and unprotected on his underbelly. The spikes on the monster suit are ornate and decorative, and upon close inspection you may notice that they are made out of sections of transparent water hose cut at sharp angles. What makes him interesting is that he's so ornate, and in many shots he doesn't look like a man in a suit. Baran was the fledgling work of one of the





Opposite: Myran Healy and Tsuruko Kabayashi as featured in the US version. Tap left: Tsuburaya's crew enjoys a laugh between shots. Top right: Nakaïma suits up for action! Bottom left: Varan! Bottom right: Fabricator Teizo Toshimitsu claws around with Varan!



young men in Tsuburaya's fabrication department, Keizo Murase, who went on to make a name for himself in the late 1960s with his own company, Twenty. To this day, enthusiasts consider Baran to be Toho's most unusual looking *kaiju*.

Because of its modest budget and black and white picture, a few shots of some of the urban destruction in VARAN were lifted from Toho's landmark film GODZILLA (1954). In fact, in one shot, Godzilla's tail stands in for Varan's! However, the stark noir photography by Hajime Koizumi (THE H-MAN) works especially well in the early scenes. The monster looks truly frightening when it appears out of the lake, framed through some dense woodland trees. The film's most impressive aspects are the lake and valley miniature sets, which are expansive and lush, and given an otherworldly atmosphere in black and white—a giant lake surrounded by eerie, misty cliffs—providing an interesting terrain for the creature to appear against.

Akira Ifukube's understated but landmark score features many sketches of what would be later recognized as his trademark *kaiju eiga* themes. These include the military march, which would be

fleshed out the next year in Ishiro Honda's BATTLE IN OUTER SPACE, as well as the eerie strains that would become the signature motif for King Ghidorah in 1964. DAIKAIJU BARAN was eventually released in Japan on October 14, 1958, and while heralded to be in "Toho Pan Scope" with "Perspecta Stereophonic Sound", Toho's advertising was fairly unspectacular, and the film essentially wound up as more or less a minor entry in their *kaiju eiga* (since color productions for these types of *tokusatsu* films were considered a recipe for success).

Interestingly, it was AB-PT who had commissioned and then backed out on Toho a year before, when they commissioned the 1b Melchior script for "The Volcano Monsters", an entirely new film that would use footage from Toho's GODZILLA RAIDS AGAIN (1955). Toho went as far as to make new suits for Godzilla and Anguirus and had them shipped to the US for new footage inserts to be shot at Howard Anderson Company. For all good intentions, it was not to be. Eventually, Warner Brothers picked up GODZILLA RAIDS AGAIN, and it became GIGANTIS, THE FIRE MONSTER, modified and dubbed by Hugo Grimaldi



Top (right and left): Publicity images of Varan. Above: On-set shot of Varan smashing the Haneda Airport terminal, because they lost his luggage! Opposite: Original Half Sheet for the US release.

(MUTINY IN OUTER SPACE), which was released in 1959 on a double-bill with Tom Graeff's infamous *TEENAGERS FROM OUTER SPACE*.

DAIKAIJU *BARAN* languished in the US until 1962, when Crown International Pictures/Dallas Productions released it under the title *VARAN THE UNBELIEVABLE*. Japanese romanization, which substitutes "B" for "V", may be why "Baran" became "Varan", but it is also part of the genus name of the giant real-life Komodo Dragon: *Varanus*. The screenplay was written by Sid Harris, with new footage directed by Jerry Bauerwitz that had almost nothing to do with the original Japanese story.

In the US version, veteran actor Myron Healy was cast as Commander James Bradley, a brusque, pushy US Navy scientist conducting desalinization experiments in a salt-water lake on a small island off the coast of Japan. Bradley is married to a Japanese woman, Anna (Tsuruko Kobayashi), whom he treats like a slave in some scenes. Despite warnings from locals, he pushes on with the water experiments and they indeed awaken "Obake" (the old Japanese word for "monster"), the lake "god" feared by

the locals on the island. Eventually, "Obake" destroys the locals' village (but manages to avoid Bradley's bungalow), heads to the coastal city of Oneida (a perversion of "Haneda"), and destroys an airport (much of the swimming and all of the flying scenes having been excised). In the climax, Varan is dispatched with the same chemical used in Bradley's experiment.

Not once is the creature referred to as "Varan" in the US version. It was also cut down to a scant 70 minutes from its original 87-minute runtime. Even so, the first hint of the monster doesn't occur until about a half hour into the film. Some of Ifukube's score remains intact, but much of it is replaced with stock music, and some scratchy Theremin cues. *VARAN THE UNBELIEVABLE* was released to US theaters on December 7, 1962, where it came and went, but became mostly famous from its availability on 8mm home movie reels. The TV print of the film sported an opening scene of an unspecific terror wreaking destruction—a gimmick used at the time for many films to entice the viewer to keep watching. A bad, scratchy print with terrible sound, it was obscure at best, even on late-night *Creature Features* shows, and virtually



disappeared from television after the '70s. Like GIGANTIS THE FIRE MONSTER, it seemed to be a lost Japanese monster movie to many people, who only heard talk of it in fan circles and rare magazine articles.

Varan was mostly known by fans as a quick "fly on" in the 1968 film DESTROY ALL MONSTERS, where he appears in the background of the final battle and in the closing epilogue, for what amounts to several seconds as essentially a 3rd-string monster. What the effects crew in fact used was a repaired—and stiffly varnished—flying puppet from the original film, giving him the nickname "monster flying squirrel" to many unfamiliar with him. Despite this fleeting appearance and his forgotten 1958 film, Varan somehow stuck in people's hearts and minds.

In 1998, VCI Video of Oklahoma, wishing to jump on the Tri-Star production hype of GODZILLA, dug up a rather scratchy Crown International print of the US version of VARAN and released it to VHS (interestingly, it was also issued in the early '80s without any fanfare and went unnoticed by many fans). Then, in 2005, Media Blasters acquired the original Japanese film that had not yet been seen (aside from some unofficial "bootleg" copies at genre conventions) and released a fine copy of the film with English subtitles and several Special Features, including yet another truncated version (originally produced for Japanese television, but never broadcast, clocking in at 50 minutes), as well as a feature on the original suit maker, Keizo Murase, who recounts how he built the original guiding based on one of Japan's current master suit makers, Fuyuki Shinada (GMK: GIANT MONSTERS ALL-OUT ATTACK).

In 2001, Varan nearly gained a new lease on life when director

Shusuke Kaneko (who helmed the 1990s Gamera trilogy) was assigned to direct that year's Godzilla film, GMK: GIANT MONSTERS ALL-OUT ATTACK. In Kaneko's original monster-line up, he included Anguirus, Baragon (from FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD), and Varan to battle Godzilla. In the original screenplay, Varan would have been the lake-monster that became Mothra in the final version. Toho's marketing department, who felt that Varan simply wasn't as viable as a toy as Mothra (!), made that decision. Anguirus became Ghidorah for the same reason. Baragon survived as a concession to Kaneko, because Toho felt that he was a "funny/cute" monster. Fuyuki Shinada even sculpted an impressive maquette of the creature, and when it was nixed, he still managed to work a bit of Varan's look into his design of King Ghidorah's heads, which eagle-eyed viewers may notice if they look close enough.

In spite of VARAN being such an obscure title, it made a strangely memorable impression on many fans, even in the '60s and '70s, when many of us could only guess at what the film would have been like, and seeing the actual film turned out to be truly a case of less seen, more demand. Varan is a *kaiju* who could have soared to stardom much higher than he did, although in the hearts of many fans, he was still a star. **N**

Bob Eggleston is a multi-Hugo Award winning science fiction artist with a passion for giant monsters. His film credits include JIMMY NEUTRON, BOY GENIUS (2001), SPHERE (1998), and concepts for the STAR TREK franchise. He also created this issue's cover, an epic battle that fans have dreamed of on both sides of the Pacific.

SUMMON SUPREME POWER: ENTER INAZUMAN!

UNIQUE '70S SUPERHERO SERIES EXPLODES ON US DVD

By DAVID E. CHAPPEL

Like many fans my age, I grew up in the '70s and '80s rushing home every afternoon from school and planting myself in front of the living room television from 3:00-4:00 pm to tune into the local independent UHF channel showings of ULTRAMAN (see FM 256) and JOHNNY SOKKO AND HIS FLYING ROBOT (see FM 256). The greatest times were when I would come home on Monday afternoons and turn to the ABC affiliate to see if this week would be "Monster Week", thanks to which I was exposed to films like GODZILLA VS. THE THING, RETURN OF THE GIANT MONSTERS, FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD, WAR OF THE MONSTERS, THE X FROM OUTER SPACE, MONSTER FROM A PREHISTORIC PLANET, and many others. It had a great and long lasting impact on me as it did with many of my friends.

During the intervening years, I met a lot of other fans at conventions (and even met some of the stars and crew of the movies and shows, who were my childhood heroes), and I was introduced to other types of Japanese science fiction shows that I came to

love. One of the people I met along the way was August Ragone, an expert in Japanese cinema and all things Japanese Sci-Fi. He introduced me to one of his favorite tokusatsu shows, KIKAIIDA (see FM 114 and 256). In the summer of 2010, we attended an autograph event in Little Tokyo near downtown Los Angeles, with the star of KIKAIIDA, Daisuke Ban. As I purchased the DVD set of KIKAIIDA for him to sign, August cajoled me into also buying the box set for another of Ban's tokusatsu hero series, INAZUMAN (both available from JN Productions/Generation Kikaido).

INAZUMAN was a weekly series produced by Toei TV Productions that ran on the Nippon Educational Network (now TV Asahi) in Japan from October 2, 1973 through March 26, 1974. This 25 half-hour episode series was immediately followed by a sequel series entitled INAZUMAN FLASH! (1974), which was much darker in tone. In the both shows, Daisuke Ban portrays Goro Watarai, a Jonan University student who discovers latent psionic (psychic) powers that awaken when he is confronted by the minions of Emperor Bamba, leader of the Neo-Human Empire,

an evil organization bent on destroying the human race. Their plan is to kidnap all Earth children with psionic powers and make them part of their mutant empire that will take humankind's place and inherit the Earth.

In every episode, Emperor Bamba—along with his goose-stepping, gas-masked Fantom Army soldiers (with extended clapping right hands and a knock for making cow! sounds when they fight)—summons a different humanoid "Mutant Robot" to defeat Goro (and his superhero alter ego, Inazuman). Bamba's main nemesis is the Youth League, a group of uniformed psionic children, "untainted by evil", which protects humanity from Bamba's every evil turn. The grotesque mutant robots of the Neo-Human Empire are unique and wild creations, some of which are elemental (Fire, Wind, Sand, Stone, Water), chemical (Gas, Photo, Oil), or earthly (Fog, Mold, Rasc)—but are all thoroughly corrupt and evil.

In the first episode, Goro, along with his trusted and bumbling bearded college pal, Gosaku Marune (Koichi Kitamura), stumble upon two young children being attacked by Fantom Soldiers. They are able to fight off the soldiers and rescue the children from a monstrous mutant robot. Later, Goro learns that the two children are members of the Youth League, and he is taken to their headquarters where he is introduced to Captain Serra (Hideo Murata), who awakens Goro's mutant abilities. Joining with them, Goro is given a Youth League uniform and *Rajiro*—a sentient and flying supercar, replete with a cache of weapons—to aid him in his fight against the Neo-Human Empire. Goro can also transform into his higher mutant form, known as "Inazuman" (*Inazuma* meaning lightning in Japanese), with a motif based on

the Goddess Psyche from Greek mythology (the moth—a symbol of transformation and enlightenment).

And so, Inazuman transforms through a two-fold metamorphosis (a rarity in the pantheon of Japanese Superheroes, who generally only have a single transformation system). When Goro needs to transform into his mutant form, he must first become *Saogaiman*, a "pupa" stage, who struggles against the enemy patiently until his maximum psionic power is built up (registered on a power gauge held) to become his ultimate form! Inazuman is a blue-costumed superhero adorned with lightning bolts, rainbow-colored eye coverings, and a mask with a trident-shaped lightning bolt antenna on top, along with long yellow flowing scarves around his neck ("The Lightning Muffler"), that can transform into many useful devices. Inazuman can also use many other psionic powers, such as reversing time, telepathy, remote viewing, X-ray vision, and super hearing. In many episodes, Inazuman also has the Super Lightning Strike: red lightning bolts shot from his gauntlets that destroy his enemies.

Conceived by famed manga writer/artist Shotaro Ishinomori (1928-1998), the creator of KIKAIIDA and KAMEN RIDER, INAZUMAN is a surreal superhero-versus-mutant serial. A theme Ishinomori would delve into throughout his career, INAZUMAN is a straightforward good versus evil show, pitting the good Youth League against the evil Neo-Human Empire. Originally, the series was planned as an animated series entitled "Mutant Z", drawing heavily from two previous Ishinomori-penned manga, *Shonen Dime* (The Youth League) and *Mutant Sabu* (Mutant Sabu). The producers at Toei Animation had initially intended to combine live-action with animation, playing around with what could be done to





expand the audience base, but this was deemed too expensive and risky, so it was decided to do a more traditional live-action show instead, which was turned over to Tohu Hirayama at Toei TV Productions, the man who turned JOHNNY SOKKO and KAMEN RIDER into hits.

Ishinomori also directed a pivotal episode of INAZUMAN, midway through the first series, that sends the show in a much darker direction (as featured in INAZUMAN FLASH). "Episode 11: Rose Bambara is Inazuman's Mother" is a visual feast that really shows its manga roots, influence from the French Nouvelle Vague, and separates it from the others—in both visual style and direction, and certainly tone. This episode is one of the highlights in an already gripping show. Ishinomori and the other writers, including Shozo Uehara (ULTRA SEVEN), filled the show with semi-religious iconography, such as the villains crucifying their victims, a self-sacrificing Catholic Nun, and sending hostages and slaves to the dark depths of various types of Hell. It is in these hells that the surreal art direction, set design, and cinematography really shine, with the shadowy, dreamlike, and even nightmarish imagery separating INAZUMAN from its contemporaries.

Great action scenes by the Ono Ken-Yukai Action Team choreographed by Takahashi Kuzotoshi, combining Aikido and Shorinji Kempo fighting styles along with high-flying trampoline work, make for an exciting blend of explosive action. This is complimented by the creative and ingenious Mutant Robot suits created by the team at Equis Productions (aka "X Productions"), founded by Yagi Kanji, Yasue Kanji, and Masao Kanji (three



brothers who created the monster suits for GODZILLA, RODAN, and many others, and later, for the GAMERA films). The sheer creativity and astounding uniqueness in the suits created for INAZUMAN—from Ishinomori's sketches to the final designs by Akira Takahashi—are some of the many high points in watching this series.

While seemingly "low budget", the average tokusatsu hero series outstripped the average show produced for American children by miles in creative content, production, music, and writing. Another thing that separates Japanese children's programming of the era from its American contemporaries is the way children are treated in the stories. Much like JOHNNY SOKKO picking up a sub-machine gun and dropping to his knees and firing on bad guys, violence and children in jeopardy are not frowned upon in this series, but embraced. In INAZUMAN, children of the Youth League and civilian children are often injured, kidnapped, and beaten by the bad guys, but in the end they usually give as good as they get, which is wish fulfillment for any kid familiar with playing Cops and Robbers on the playground, where getting "killed" happens all the time, and is part of the fun.

But the show is not all about action. It also has a heart and a message. Many of the stories and themes center on the importance of family, and are often uplifting and exciting. Every episode ends with the problem solved, the people in jeopardy saved. This is an important element in the good versus evil theme, and



Opposite: 1973 original 45 Single Record (left) and 2008 US publicity art (right). This page: (left) The Warrior of Freedom, Inozumant! (above left) and Inozuman's pupa-form, Sonogimen! (above right)

good always triumphs here (though Episode 11, the aforementioned standout segment directed by Shotaro Ishinomori, is a tragic and personal story for Goro, and has a horrific revelation for him, temporarily breaking this format).

The lavish DVD set of INAZUMAN, released in 2008, contains all 25 color episodes in the original Japanese language with English subtitles, and is packed full of Special Features, including copious and informative (and exhaustive) Series Factoids by August Ragone for each and every episode, Character Profiles, Cast and Staff bios, a Trivia Quiz, Inazuman Karaoke, Fan Interviews (featuring tokusatsu fans

from Hawaii and Japan), and an emotional and heartfelt interview with star Daisuke Ban, shot while he was recovering from a recent health scare. Although there are no Audio Commentaries by the cast or crew, the sheer number of Special Features should satisfy the most rabid collector and start you on your way in picking up the other great JN Productions releases, such as KAMEN RIDER V3 (Kamen Raida Buisuri, 1973) and KIKAIIDA 01 (Kikaido Zerowan, 1973).

INAZUMAN was a great introduction to the Golden Age of tokusatsu heroes for me, and the Special Features are a great master class on the show and the genre in general. With great writing, compelling storylines, sumptuous visuals, great action, and wonderfully funky music by Michiaki "Chumci" Watanabe (KIKAIIDA), INAZUMAN is a fun and exciting example of tokusatsu hero television for any fan. "Summon Massive Power! Summon Supreme Power!"

David E. Chapple is a writer living in Southern California who was involved in the production of the direct-to-video Japanese Sci-Fi series CHRONO POLICE: WECKER (Jiku Keisatsu Wokka, 2001).

THEY'RE DELICIOUS REALLY!

A LOOK
Back at

MATANGO:

ATTACK OF THE MUSHROOM PEOPLE

by Jason Varney

When it comes to Toho visual effects films, the first things that come to mind are the "Kaiju Eiga" (or "Monster Films"), best represented by Godzilla and his brethren: Rodan, Mothra, King Ghidorah, et al. These films, perfected by director Ishiro Honda (GODZILLA), producer Tomoyuki Tanaka (YOJIMBO), composer Akira Ifukube (THE BURMESE HARP), and special effects director Eiji Tsuburaya (BATTLE IN OUTER SPACE) thrilled audiences the world over, and continue to gain new fans to this day.

However, Toho had another series of films made in the late 50s and early 60s that was dubbed the "Mutant Series", consisting of Honda's THE H-MAN (*Bijo to Ektai Ningen*, 1958), Honda's

THE HUMAN VAPOR (*Gassu Ningen Dai-Ichigo*, 1960), and Jun Fukuda's SECRET OF THE TELEGIAN (*Denso Ningen*, 1960). These catered to sci-fi fans, but focused more on story and characterization for the uninitiated. The final film in the series is MATANGO (1963), which is perhaps the strongest film in the series, as well as one of the best science-fiction films Toho ever made.

The storyline, at least on its surface, is refreshingly unconvoluted. A yachting party heads out from Tokyo for a relaxing day at sea. Among them are the yacht's owner Masafumi Kasai (Yoshio Tsuchiya), college professor Kenji Murai (Akira Kubo), his girlfriend Akiko Soma (Miki Yashiro), nightclub singer Mami Sekiguchi (Kumi Mizuno), and a writer, Eisuro Yoshida (Hiroshi Tachikawa). Also along with them are the skipper Naoyuki Sakuda (Hiroshi Kotzumi) and his first mate, Senzo Koyama (Kenji Sahara). It is never stated where they are going or when they are aiming to return, but Mother Nature has other plans for them, as they soon enter a fierce storm that all but demolishes the yacht. Adrift and helpless, they finally reach a deserted island, but the helplessness and hunger they encounter there will be far worse than they could have realized. There is something evil waiting for







Opposite: Hideyo Amamoto as the Unwelcome Visitor. This page: Miniature shot of the derelict ship (top left). Murai, Sakuda, and Kasai discover the Matango (top right). Attack of the Mushroom People (bottom right).



composing for this) adds immeasurably to the tension in many scenes, particularly when Kasai is trying to rob food from the others but is interrupted by an unwelcome visitor. Bekku only scored about a dozen films, two of which were part of the "International Secret Police" series, which would later be edited into Woody Allen's *WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY?* in 1966. He also scored the killing Toho film Nick Adams starred in, the stubbornly elusive *THE THIRTING BOTTLE* (*Kokusai Himitsu Keisatsu Zettai Zetsumei*) in 1967.

Of course, one of the major reasons for *MATANGO*'s popularity is the stellar cast that Honda assembled for the project. As has been written elsewhere, Honda wanted each character to take their role extremely seriously. And do they ever. Akira Kubo is great as the hero, Murai. A star who appeared in a wide variety of genres throughout his career, he would go on to other heroic roles in Jun Fukuda's *SON OF GODZILLA* (*Kūju-ta no Keito Gōjirō-no Musuko*, 1967), *DESTROY ALL MONSTERS* (*Kaiju Soshingeki*, 1968), and *SPACE AMOeba* (*Gozora Gantime Kameoba Nankai-no Daikajin*, 1970). His final scene in *MATANGO* gave me nightmares as a child.

Also fantastic is Kenji Sahara (*RODAN*) as the slimy Koyama. "I had never played an evil character before, but Honda really wanted me to challenge myself," recalled Sahara in his 2005 autobiography. "I decided perhaps my character would have poor vision, so I had him wear glasses at all times." There was also quite an extreme step he took. "I went to my dentist and had him remove a tooth a week before filming began!"

Hiroshi Koizumi (*MOTHRA*) breaks out of his usual scientist roles to play one of the only characters with any moral compass. At least, that's what we initially are led to believe. And nobody can play a crackpot like Yoshio Tsuchiya (*SEVEN SAMURAI*).

Tsuchiya has a bit of a penchant for playing conflicted characters, as the lead in *THE HUMAN VAPOR* and the research scientist who cracks in *SON OF GODZILLA*, but it is as Kasai that Tsuchiya really left his mark. He conveys hunger and desperation so well that we sympathize with him by the end, even though throughout, was the most repulsive character. Hiroshi Tachikawa (*THRONE OF BLOOD*) is equally good as the egotistical novelist Yoshida.

The female characters are equally fantastic. Mami, played by Kumi Mizuno (*THE GAMBLING SAMURAI*), is the very definition of "femme fatale". Just look at the evil delight in her eyes when Koyama and Yoshida are fighting over her. "We filmed in Oshima (an island off Tokyo) for about a month," Mizuno recalled. "Every night we would play mahjong, drink, and dance. It was a lot of fun!"

As Akiko, Miki Yashiro (*HIGH AND LOW*) underplays her role, but the final scene of her eating mushrooms is unforgettable. She would be back in the following year's *MOTHRA VS. GODZILLA* (*Mosura tai Gōjirō*) as a schoolteacher.

Haruo Nakajima, famous for playing Godzilla and other monsters from 1954 to 1972, also made an appearance in *MATANGO*. As he recalled in his 2010 biography, Eiji Tsuburaya had come up to him and told him of the next film he needed him for. "You won't be Godzilla, so you'll have it easy this time. You're going to be a mushroom monster." Nakajima had no idea what he meant by that, and had no way of imagining what such a creature would look like. "I read the screenplay, and it seemed kind of boring."



Honda, in black shirt, prepping a shot (left). Honda (in straw hat) and Tsuburaya, prepare the cast for a process shot of the derelict ship (right). Below: "I'm ready for my close-up, Mr. Tsuburaya..."

Nakajima recalled. "But when I saw the finished film, I realized its themes about the danger of drugs and the weakness of man were very strong."

One thing many people who watch the film want to know is exactly what the characters were actually eating. It was "mochi," a Japanese rice cake, which is slightly gelatinous and chewy. The special effects staff would have fun playing with the colors and flavors of the mochi. Mizuno recalled that she would never know exactly what the mochi of the day would taste like, but that they were usually quite tasty.

MATANGO is simply one of Ishiro Honda's best films, and those that have not come across it yet are in for a treat. Media Blasters released the film in 2005 on DVD, and I encourage all to seek the film out. There is nothing quite like it. *N*

Jason Varney is a life-long fan of Japanese fantastic cinema. He has lived and worked in Japan, and served as Haruo Nakajima's interpreter. He received a Rondo Award nomination for the Audio Commentary on the Shout! Factory release of GAMERA VS. BARUGON in 2011.



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RICHARD J SCHELLBACH'S IN MY WRITE MIND

One Giant Epiphany



Look at you! Right now, you are reading what has become a favorite event: the Japanese Monsters issue of *Famous Monsters Of Filmland*. There are millions of fans out there who, just like you, look forward to this issue with great anticipation. It's always been that way. Ever since Kong and other early behemoths crashed their way onto the movie screens of the twenties, thirties, and forties, people have been lining up around the block to see what damage they would do, not to mention which architectural landmarks they would do it to.

But the fan base for these monstrously monstrous monsters (yeah, I know... they're just

misunderstood) hit truly ginormous proportions when a little film about a big lizard invaded the local theaters in either 1954 or 1956—depending on which hemisphere you lived in. Its name was *Gojira* (Godzilla), and although I didn't get to see the original Japanese version 'til just a few years back, I knew instantly, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the US version was better.

Why?

Steve Martin!

No, not the arrow-through-the-head, banjo-pickin' comedian who starred in *THE MAN WITH TWO BRAINS*—I'm talking about the American reporter who was overseas covering a number of disasters off of Japan's coastline when Godzilla attacked Tokyo. That Steve Martin was played by a man who had worked for the likes of Alfred Hitchcock and Gordon Douglas, and had been in at least two movies with the word "gorilla" in the title: Raymond Burr. And no matter who Godzilla faced in the Japanese version, America showed what we were made of when we hurled the hulking Raymond Burr into the US version. In the mid-fifties you could stomp all over any iron curtain country you wanted, but try messin' with our new ally, Japan, and we'd assuredly open up a giant-sized can of Burr on your sorry butt!

Godzilla may be

one lofty lizard, but he was no match for the Burr-meister. And that, kids, is how Raymond Burr single-handedly killed Godzilla and saved Tokyo.... at least, that's how I remember it. I should add that, in the interest of full disclosure, my memory might be a tad faulty, as I haven't seen the US version in around fifty years.

I enjoyed Godzilla. I really did. It left me wanting more. Unfortunately, that's not what I got. Oh there were more Godzilla. Mothra, Rodan, and Gamera movies than you could shake your proverbial stick at on New York television in the seventies and eighties. But in my opinion, none of them could hold a candle to my original viewing of *GODZILLA: KING OF THE MONSTERS*. And what started as a love affair with a rather large thunder lizard became a roll-of-the-eyes event every time one of his movies showed up on TV.

Now, don't get ticked off at me. I like what I like, and you guys like what you like. But for the life of me, back then, I couldn't figure out what anyone saw in these films.

I know what you're thinking right now. You're wondering why a guy who dislikes giant Japanese monsters as much as I do would write over a thousand words about it in this particular issue of this particular magazine... without fear of being tarred, feathered, and burned alive at the next Monster Bash.

The answer, dear reader, is a simple one: This column isn't about hate—it's about an epiphany of... well... gargantuan proportions.

I can't remember if I was sick and home from school or whether it was summer vacation, but some time in the mid to late seventies I stumbled upon a movie called *WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS* on Channel 7, or 9—heck, it could have even been 11. As soon as it began, I saw a giant octopus attacking a cargo freighter, and I moved in to perform an act that I had done so many times before: a little ditty I like to call The Big Channel Change. But just as my

index finger and thumb found the channel knob, a giant, hairy, greenish, humanoid, Frankensteinian-looking monster popped out of the water and did a beat-down on that octopus with a ferocity that is only witnessed once a year at Wrestlemania.

Once this giant, hairy, greenish, humanoid, Frankensteinian-looking monster sent the octopus to Davy Jones' locker, I was amazed at the fight, but dismayed that here, unfortunately,



Publicity shot with Haruo Nakajima as Gaira (left) and Hiroshi Sekida as Sanda (right).

was a *good* monster who had saved the captain of the freighter. You see, I like my monsters bad... *really* bad. Luckily, that feeling of dismay lasted for all of three seconds—right up 'til the time the giant, hairy, greenish, humanoid, Frankensteinian-looking monster started beating the hell out of the ship in an effort to send it to the briny deep, just a few feet away from the now-dead giant octopus that was trying to sink it in the first place. At that moment, I realized that this movie was going to kick ass.

WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS quickly became one of my favorite guilty pleasures. Starting almost immediately after the movie ended, I poured through each week's *TV Guide* in the hope of seeing it again. I happen to think the effects and miniature work are among the best ever to grace a Toho or Daiei movie. The fight between the two gargantuas (oh, come on. That isn't a spoiler. Look at the title!) seemed to go on forever; and yet, it never got boring. The slow motion during the destruction scenes was perfect.

Sure, the *entire* film isn't perfect. No movie is. Early on, Kipp Hamilton sings a song entitled "The Words Get Stuck In My Throat". Not to diminish Ms. Hamilton's talent, but based on her performance, I suspect that singing wasn't her strong suit. In fact, I think it's safe to say that if the myriad



Evocative collage photo typifying the classic kaiju eiga era of the 1960s.

the American version of the film. Far from placing the fate of the world—well, Tokyo—on the broad shoulders of Raymond Burr (and let's face it: there were never a broader set of shoulders in the history of Hollywood), Japan's citizens had to rely on the 117 pound (soaking wet) frame of Russ Tamblyn. Don't get me wrong; I love Russ Tamblyn in everything from *THE HAUNTING* to *TWIN PEAKS*. But when I want a guy to go in and save Tokyo from the Japanese monster equivalent of Hillbilly Jim and King Kong Bundy, Russ Tamblyn just isn't on my short list. I'd rather rely on the cast of *THE EXPENDABLES* than one of the "badasses" who danced his way through *WEST SIDE STORY*.

It doesn't happen often to us geeks, but every once in a while, a movie comes along to restore our faith in one of horror's many sub-genres. *WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS* did that for me. It changed the way I've looked at all giant Japanese monster movies since. I've never been a particularly fast guy. I'm more the laid back type. Thinking back on that day, I'm glad I wasn't in more of a hurry to change the channel. **W**

TOMO'O HARAGUCHI

VS. FUYUKI SHINADA

TWO COLOSSAL KAIJU MEN SPEAK OF MAKING MONSTERS

by Jim Cirronella

The '90s "Kaiju Boom" brought about a rebirth for the Godzilla, Gamera, and Ultraman franchises, and along with it a resurgence in the time-honored tradition of kaiju suit-making. With giant monsters in big demand, so were the skills of Japan's effects artists specializing in this craft—those dedicated monster makers often expected to deliver creature design on an immense scale for a fraction of the budget allotted to their Western counterparts. Standing tall among this niche group are Tomo'o Haraguchi and Fuyuki Shinada, both having contributed to what is arguably the era's preeminent kaiju film, *GAMERA 3: REVENGE OF IRIS* (1999). It was during this time that I was fortunate enough to speak at length with these men behind the monsters, and visit the special effects set of *GAMERA 3* to see their handiwork in action.

people, because there weren't any special make-up effects artists in Japan at the time. My teacher was Shinichi Wakasa, and I began working with him as an assistant on both *ULTRAMAN 80* (1980) and *ANDRO MELOS* (1983). Mr. Wakasa's influences were artists like Rick Baker [see FM's interview in this issue], and while working on *STAR WOLF*, Mr. Yamaguchi would often read *Starlog* magazine. I not only watched *Godzilla*, *Ultraman*, and *Gamera* on television as a child, but I watched Hammer films as well. I also enjoyed [Ray Harryhausen's] *Dynamation* films very much, which were influential in prompting me to do work for animation master Kieichiro Kawamoto."

Having grown up as a monster kid in Japan, Fuyuki Shinada told a similar and familiar story. When asked about the films that most influenced him, he made it a point to pronounce the titles in English: "VARAN THE UNBELIEVABLE and GIGANTIS THE FIRE MONSTER," he laughed. "When I was a child, *VARAN* (1958)



Having frequented Japan's movie studios during the golden age of kaiju film and television production, Tomo'o Haraguchi couldn't help but become a special effects artist. After working as an assistant to master monster maker Shinichi Wakasa, he initially pursued a freelance career as a special make-up effects artist. It was his ongoing relationship with visual effects director Shinji Higuchi, however, that would eventually land him the job of reimagining Gamera. Haraguchi reflected on what led him down this career path: "When I was very young, I would often visit Toho Studios and Toho Built Studios, so I was able to see the production of many classic movies and television series, the first I recall being *GODZILLA VS. THE SEA MONSTER* and *THE WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS* (both 1966). While at Toho Built, I also saw filming of the *ULTRAMAN* episode "Phantom of the Snow Mountain", featuring the monster Woo, as well as another episode featuring the alien Baltan. Most of my influences came from movies rather than

Left: It's not a PEZ dispenser! Haraguchi with his Gyoos puppet. Above: Who said men can't play with dolls? Shinada and the Irys maquette.



"Say goodnight to the bad guy!" Too much sake in Tokyo's Akihabara district and you never know who you might run into.

was shown on television many times, and it was always my favorite.

"My first job was designing the monster Sasorimonger for the TV series SOLAR TASK FORCE: SUNVULCAN (1981). I only did the design; I didn't build the suit, although about two years later, I began working for Rainbow Zoukei building monsters for SCIENCE TASK FORCE: DYNAMAN and SPACE SHERIFF SHARIVAN (both 1988). After I'd left Rainbow, I worked freelance for a couple of years before forming the company Build-Up with several other people. At the time, Build-Up's president and producer, Nobuya Okabe approached Toho about working on the new Godzilla "versus" film series, which led to me working on GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE (1989)."

Almost immediately, Shinada garnered a reputation for building creatures both impossibly large and unbelievably alien-like with inherently realistic qualities. "Biollante was much too big for us to make inside Build-Up's studio, so we had to rent a warehouse at Toho Studios. Maybe ten people were involved in the project, although not all of them were regular staff. While I was making the [Biollante] suit, Toho's staff would be standing around watching. It was a lot of pressure for me. I lost 11 pounds working on that film!"

Despite the overwhelming stress, Shinada persevered and was enlisted to work on the follow-up film, GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH (1991), bringing to life the Godzillasaurus that eventually mutates into the iconic monster. "In GODZILLA (1984), the monster wasn't based on a radioactive dinosaur, so I wanted to create a Godzilla that recalls the original film's image. I think the original Godzilla has a face like a Tyrannosaurus Rex with the hands of an Iguanodon and the back of a Stegosaurus. It's the look of an old-style dinosaur. [Visual Effects Director] Koichi Kawakita also wanted to capture the look of a new-style dinosaur, the kind where the tail does not touch the ground, so the dinosaur art of Charles R. Knight was an influence on the design of Godzillasaurus."

Though not an accomplished suit-maker at the time, it was due to an earlier professional relationship that led to Tomo'o Haraguchi tackling creature construction on Daisi's Gamera reboot in 1995. "When I worked on TOKYO: THE LAST MEGALOPOLIS (1988), it was the first time that I worked with Shinji Higuchi. I was doing the make-up effects, and he was doing the storyboards; we soon learned that we enjoyed the same films and had something in common. Then when I directed MIKADROID (1991) for Toho, I asked Mr. Higuchi to direct the visual effects. At this time, he wanted to become a visual effects director, and MIKADROID was his first professional credit in that area.

"When it was decided that he would be the special effects director on GAMERA: GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE (1995), Mr. Higuchi asked me to build the monster suits, though I initially turned him down. I was worried about making monster suits because prior to that, I had only assisted Mr. Wakasa and had never made suits by myself. But because Mr. Higuchi had done so many things for MIKADROID with so little money, I changed my mind. Higuchi had first approached other effects workshops that specialized in building suits for Godzilla and Ultraman films to build the suits for Gamera, but these companies said the budget was much too cheap. So he asked me."

Adapting the classic movie monster for modern audiences, however, was never a concern for Haraguchi. "I didn't think about updating the monster for the 90s," he recalled. "I was only thinking about how to make the best possible monster with the limited budget that we had to work with. I felt audiences watching the movie would get the impression that Gamera still looked like a 1960s monster anyhow. When Mr. Wakasa makes kaiju suits for the new Godzilla films, he tries to utilize new materials, techniques, and style. On GAMERA, however, we were using old techniques and materials like those that I saw when I was young. For example, Mr. Wakasa

typically uses Burman Latex from Hollywood, but our film's budget couldn't afford that type of material, so we used cheaper Japanese latex. We actually used some Styrofoam that we found in the garbage to make a flying Gyaos model!

"Daiei also wanted us to keep the image of the original Gamera," he continues. "But both directors, [Shusuke] Kaneko and Higuchi, wanted to make the monster more realistic; they just couldn't agree on which direction to take. So I combined all of these ideas, mixing old and new images. I also like the style of Jim Henson's creature shop and had wanted a similar design for Gamera. For Gyaos, once again, they couldn't decide on the final concept. Because Mr. [Mahiro] Maeda had made many designs, I just combined them with a female image, as well as the concept that Gyaos would be eating people."

Shinada related how he became involved in GAMERA 2: ATTACK OF THE LEGION (1996), creating a new enemy monster to battle Haraguchi's redesigned Gamera. "Before the Gamera series had started, Build-Up had become more of a CGI effects company, so Mr. Okabe encouraged me to find a job better suited to my monster-making skills. I left Build-Up and formed my own company, Vi-Shop, in 1994. Since Higuchi and Build-Up had worked together on a television commercial, Okabe suggested that [Higuchi] contact me for help on G2, which was to have many monsters in it."

Haraguchi also discussed changes to the monsters for the follow-up film: "The first film's costume was not the image that director Kaneko had envisioned, so when we began work on G2, we tried to make the monster more like his idea. On the first GAMERA, there were a lot of problems with the studio whenever we wanted

to change things. But then the film became popular, so Daiei eventually accepted those things that we had changed. For example, we'd originally wanted to give Gamera flipper-like wings for the flight scenes, but Daiei said that it wasn't the image of the original monster. After the success of the first film, however, Daiei said it was okay to do our concept for the next film."

"For G2, we didn't have a very big budget either, though we had many more monsters to make. So for this reason, we only changed Gamera's face and tried to utilize the same basic suit, just as Toho had done with Godzilla many times. And after he saw GAMERA: GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE, Mr. Shinada decided that he wanted to work on the Gamera series, too, so he created the enemy monster, Legion. But on that first film, we only had a staff of five people to make everything!"

Shinada talked about the challenges of realizing the very large and otherworldly Legion: "I prefer to make the enemy monsters. We can't change (the design of) established characters like Godzilla or Gamera. They must meet with the audience's expectations. The enemy monster can provide something new and different."

When I received the original design [for Legion], it looked very difficult, like the combination of a bird and humanoid monster. The enormous design required two suit actors inside, one in the front and one in the back. Unfortunately, it took over 15 minutes just to put on the suit, and even then, the actors could only stay inside for 20 minutes, so it was very hard work for them. The actor in the back would move the giant legs, but because he was unable to push, the actor in front had to pull him along. Even though there were small wheels to help with the movement, it was a very heavy costume." Haraguchi added, "I envisioned Gamera holding back this mighty force, Legion, just as Superman would hold back a speeding train in the old Max Fleischer cartoons."

With the success of G2 cementing production of a third film in the series, it was inevitable that both Haraguchi and Shinada would

Gamera's innards, what counts is on the inside.



be back on the same team, though once again creating opposing monsters to tear up the screen. "In the third film, Gamera is not the hero, so I wanted to show a more frightening image to the audience," said Haraguchi. "It is more important that the audience identify with the character of Ayana instead of the monster. Daiel also wanted to change Gyaos [from the first film] so that they could offer different merchandise. The design is much closer to Mr. Maeda's original concept than what was ultimately used in the first film."

Shinada once again found himself creating an earthbound yet very alien enemy: "The original design for Iris resembled a Toei [Studios] monster, as well as the overall appearance of an anime creature. I had to interpret this complex design as a three-dimensional suit and once again try to diminish any humanoid aspects to make it look more like a monster. For Legion, it was difficult to plan how a monster that enormous would be able to engage in close-quarters combat. For Iris, although it is more humanoid in shape, there were still just as many complications to the monster's design. I wanted to achieve the look of the "king" from Nostradamus' prophecies—the image of catastrophe, as well as a bit of Gyaos in the design. Iris's wings are like that of a king's cape."

As computer graphics began to play a larger role in realizing the monsters for G3, both artists found it necessary to accommodate the ever-changing landscape of motion picture effects. Haraguchi recalled, "On the first GAMERA, we used wire work for Gyaos' flying scenes, and it's very difficult to hide the wires using this technique. In Tobo films, they use CGI to remove the wires from sight, but the Gamera films didn't have the budget needed to do that type of work. On G3, we used CGI for the flying scenes, which is much easier for the staff than wirework, although we didn't yet have the budget that would allow for an entirely CGI monster. So long shots could be created using CGI, but we still had to use puppets for the close-up, such as Gyaos. On G3, there was a lot of money allocated for CGI effects, although my own budget became even smaller because of this!"

At the time, Shinada shared his thoughts on the era's evolving visual effects and how classic suit-making techniques continue to play a role in monster movies. "CGI presently doesn't match traditional suit effects in live-action films very well. A similar situation once existed with suits and animatronics. Kaiju films originally only used suits and puppets. With THE RETURN OF GODZILLA (1984), however, there began the use of animatronics that initially didn't match very well with the suit effects. Several years later, the technology has improved, and now the two techniques match very well. This same situation exists with CGI, but perhaps in the future," he predicted, "these effects will match better and hopefully, a new style of kaiju eiga will emerge."

Since working on the Gamera films, both monster makers have accomplished projects of increasing range and scope. Fulfilling his love of traditional Yokai folklore, Haraguchi directed SAKUYA: SLAYER OF DEMONS (2000), with Higuchi helming the special effects and Shinada building a cat-like creature for the film, as well as the recent DEATH KAPPA (2010). Shinada also realized a life-long dream of creating Godzilla for the monster's 2002 film outing, directed by Shusuke Kaneko. If given a choice, Haraguchi prefers special make-up appliances that allow for the actor's full range to building monster suits. Shinada, meanwhile, takes a forward-looking approach in choosing his favorite kaiju creation: "I haven't made it yet!"



Special thanks to Takahiko Mamiya.

ATTACK OF THE Sprocket Monsters

JAPANESE MONSTER MOVIE MEMORIES ON SUPER 8MM

BY DAVID MCROBIE



Growing up in the 1970s, we used to own monster movies—not on video cassettes or DVDs, but on actual reels of film that had to be projected on a screen in a darkened room. With Super 8mm, you had to learn how to thread the movie into your projector, and in some cases, learn how to splice it if an unfortunate accident happened. Many of the wonderful things associated with the actual movie-going experience were present in your den or living room, especially if popcorn was being made.

Some older fans sought out and bought or rented actual full 16mm prints of these movies (usually non-anamorphic pan & scan versions), but the rest of us kids had to make due with shorter compilations available on 8mm (also known as “Regular 8”) or Super 8mm (also known as “Super 8”, as in the J.J. Abrams film from 2011). These reels, available in most camera shops or department stores (or from Captain Company in the pages of *Famous Monsters*) would generally cost between \$6.95 and \$7.95 a pop (depending on whether you ordered them or bought them at Kmart) for the 200’ reel, and about \$2.95 for the 50’ reel. When we weren’t sure if a particular monster movie would play or air in our area, these were godsend, and Ken

Films (one of the biggest in the business) was our savior.

In the early days of these 8mm & Super 8mm films, the vast majority of the titles offered, whether it was from Ken, Castle, Mountain, or Blackhawk Films, were only available silent and in black and white versions. Ken Films released a number of popular titles (including those from the American International Pictures catalogue), including *RODAN*, *THE FLYING MONSTER* (1956), *VARAN, THE UNBELIEVABLE* (1962), *GODZILLA VS. THE THING* (1964), *GHIDRAH, THE THREE-HEADED MONSTER* (1964), *FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD* (1965), *MONSTER FROM A PREHISTORIC PLANET* (1967), *DESTROY ALL MONSTERS* (1968), and *VOYAGE INTO SPACE* (1968). Interestingly, titles such as *GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS* (1954), *GIGANTIS, THE FIRE MONSTER* (1955), *THE MYSTERIANS* (1957), *MOTHR A* (1961), *KING KONG VS. GODZILLA* (1962), *MONSTER ZERO* (1965), and *THE WAR OF THE GARGANTUAS* (1966) never made it to the 8mm format. On the other hand, Columbia Pictures issued both B&W and Color versions of *BATTLE IN OUTER SPACE* (1959) for many years.





Before the advent of Home Video, these little reels of actual celluloid brought incredible joy to Creepy Boppers across America—especially those of us into Japanese Monster movies.
Photo: Edward E. Holland.

After obtaining a new Super 8mm movie, it was imperative that a viewing happen as soon as possible. Seeing a movie in this format, even before it aired on television, was something else. There was an excitement present as the film unspooled in watching new footage of monsters you had never seen before. Seeing Godzilla rise from to the surface of the ocean and blast a ship with his atomic breath was amazing. Even after the first exciting viewing, the movies would be watched numerous times, and yes, sometimes in reverse (which was humorous most of the time). It's quite something to see buildings rebuild themselves in a Godzilla movie.

My brother and I watched the movies I owned enough times that we knew all the scenes by heart. By the time *VARAN, THE UNBELIEVABLE* actually aired on local television, we already knew when all the best parts were about happen. In retrospect, it was amazing how well they actually condensed the storylines into a ten minute reel. The silent versions deftly used subtitles to get the story across, occasionally using actual dialogue from the movies to help. Take *DESTROY ALL MONSTERS*, for example: it starts out with the attack on Ogasawara Island and quickly segues into Rodan destroying Moscow and Gorosaurus taking out the Arc de Triomphe. A short exposition with the Kilaak invaders lets us know what's going on, and then it goes right back to the action: Godzilla destroys NYC, the Moonlight SY3 crew takes out the Kilaak moon base, and the final battle with King Ghidorah takes place. It's a very satisfying ten or so minutes of viewing. When *DESTROY ALL MONSTERS* would be scheduled to air on TV, I would often watch the Super 8mm compilation in preparation for

the viewing experience.

In considering Ken Films' catalog now (Ken Films always had catalogs of their inventory at Kmart), I am a bit surprised at what they chose to license. There were no Gamera movies, or even later titles such as *GODZILLA VS. THE SMOG MONSTER* (1971) or *YOG, MONSTER FROM SPACE* (1970), which would have seemed to be natural inclusions, since they came right from AIP's library. What would make *YONGARY, MONSTER FROM THE DEEP* (a poor man's *GAMERA* from South Korea) a more appealing title than *ATTACK OF THE MONSTERS* (aka *GAMERA VS. GUILLON*)? Sometimes I think they just put titles on a dartboard and picked whatever movies the dart hit.

Most of these films were silent until the mid '70s, when magnetic sound came to the Super 8mm format, and color became more common. Since I didn't have a sound projector growing up, I never owned any of the later sound versions. I have seen several now, and they are exactly the same sequence, with actual dialogue from the movies, and some narration added here and there. The added narration for *DESTROY ALL MONSTERS* included lines about "evil spirits in a cave" controlling the monsters, while at the end, the monsters decided it was better to protect the Earth than to destroy it.

All the movies I have owned or watched in Super 8mm do a pretty stellar job of condensation. In fact, some have said a movie like *VARAN* actually benefits from being reduced down to ten minutes. Ken Films usually got the basic story across, with enough human interaction and plenty of monster action. That was enough



A sample of the kaiju box art for these gems of a bygone age, before Blu-ray, laserdiscs, and even Betamax!

of a selling point for me! Funnily enough, VARAN didn't even get the full time, as it had a "Preview of Coming Attractions" at the end, which was about two minutes of an OUR GANG short (1938's HIDE AND SHRIEK).

Another fun thing about Ken Films' presentations were the boxes they came in. The cover art was always garish and evocative, usually reimagining the original, bold theatrical posters for small-scale packaging. Still, the feeling was that as a fan, you had another piece of memorabilia to add to your collection. Having said that, some box art was wildly misleading, such as that created for BATTLE OF THE MONSTERS (also advertised as "Ghidrah Battles"), which were the Godzilla-Rodan-Mothra fight scenes from GHIDRAH. While the triple-headed terror was prominently featured on the box art, he was nowhere to be seen in those ten minutes. I was very disappointed the first time I watched the movie, waiting for Ghidrah to show.

I had only ever seen one episode of JOHNNY SOKKO AND HIS FLYING ROBOT (see FM 256) at the time, and I didn't know that VOYAGE INTO SPACE was a feature-length compilation of that series, but I remember it being sold at our local Kmart. Ken Films' great box art doesn't give you any hint or indication that it's a giant monster show, which was sad for me, as I would have bought that one as soon as I saved up another allowance.

But, by the end of the '70s it seemed as though Super

8mm's days were numbered. As VHS started to take over in the early '80s, the format became far less desirable. The immediate excitement in seeing an entire movie far outweighed that little box of celluloid. At first, these pre-recorded tapes were astronomically expensive, but by the late '80s, entire Godzilla movies could be had for \$9.95-\$19.95—an extremely competitive price, considering that these were in color and with sound and required no projector or screen. So the choice became "buy the tape" (or buy a blank and record 3-4 movies on one cassette). Besides, home movie projectors were also increasingly hard to keep in good repair, and if your blub burnt out, your home theater was on hiatus.

While Super 8mm films are no longer sold today, they remain a fun and somewhat collectable artifact of days gone by when genre movies were not readily available to fans. There was something special in holding an actual reel of movie film in your hands, and it was even more special if it contained the monsters you loved. While it's nice to have complete movies on a shiny little disc, there's just not the same thrill as owning a movie on any film format—be it 8mm, Super 8mm, 16mm, or 35mm. For kids back in those halcyon days, Super 8mm was the closest we ever thought we could get to actually owning a monster movie.

Over the last few years, there has been a small, but renewed and growing interest in Super 8mm, and fans are once again hosting their own Super 8mm parties. Regardless all of the technical advances in home video presentations, there's still nothing quite like the thrill of seeing Godzilla rise out of the ocean on a big screen in a real film format—no matter what gauge or year it is! 🦖

David McRobie is the webmaster of Xenorama: www.xenorama.blogspot.com.

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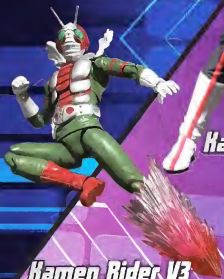
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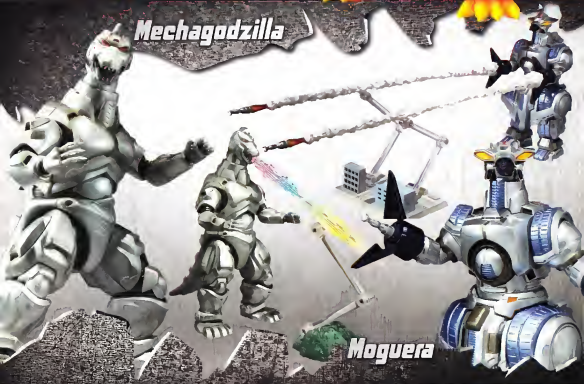
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PHENOMENA (1985)

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

"Monsters are born too tall, too strong, too heavy—that is their tragedy,"
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NEXT ISSUE:

Our Comic Con issue is about to explode! 2012 marks the 100th birthday of the company that has become the first name in horror: Universal. FAMOUS MONSTERS is proud to take a look back through the horror and Sci-Fi films in the 100-year legacy of the house that Carl Laemmle built. From DRACULA and FRANKENSTEIN to THE DARK CRYSTAL and THE THING, we'll do everything in our powers to stuff one hundred years of hallowed Hollywood history into a single issue!

TERROR-IFIC TOMES

UNHOLY NIGHT

Seth Grahame-Smith
Grand Central Publishing
320pp

The author who brought us PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES and ABRAHAM LINCOLN: VAMPIRE HUNTER is back putting a new spin on an old tale. This time, Grahame-Smith sets his power of re-imagination on the Nativity story. The tale is that of Balbazar, one of the wise men present at the birth of Christ. But unlike the familiar version, here our three wise men are outlaws on the run, accompanying Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus—outlaws in their own right as King Herod has proclaimed all male infants killed for fear of a prophecy foretelling the end of the Roman Empire—as the group attempts to escape Roman legions and a very ancient and dangerous force set loose by Caesar himself to stop the fleeing group.



JOSS WHEDON

JOSS WHEDON:
THE COMPLETE
COMPANION
May Alice Money
(editor)
Titan Books
485pp

A book filled with essays and interviews delving in to the "big bang" that gave birth to the Whedonverse. Joss Whedon, king of the geeks/nerds, has long been a fan favorite for bringing such unique and complex stories as BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER, FIREFLY, DR. HORRIBLE, and THE AVENGERS to life. This book breaks down the motivations and psychologies of many of the characters while digging into the "rules" that govern the various worlds in the Whedonverse. From the ethics of Malcolm Reynolds to Whedon's strong female characters, this book is a fantastic look inside one of the greatest imaginations of this generation of storytellers. A must-read.



The second in this brilliant anthology of horror comics brings another set of fantastic stories. We saw some of this issue at Comic Con last year and have been dying for it to hit the shelves. With cover by the Monster Maker himself, Rick Baker, this is another fear-filled entry into the series that will hopefully bring many, many more issues. This one is truly worthy of having such a legendary name attached to it. A must read for horror and comic fans.



AMPED
Daniel H. Wilson
Doubleday
288pp

Fresh off the success of ROBOPOCALYPSE (currently being adapted for film by Steven Spielberg), Wilson returns with another fast-paced Sci-Fi thriller. The story surrounds Owen Gray, and "Amp", one who has had a special implant given to him to treat a medical condition. Amps have greater powers, as a result of the implant, and a public backlash occurs. Much like X-MEN, the amps are treated differently and given different legal rights than those who aren't enhanced. When Gray goes "off the reservation" and discovers his Amp can give him far greater powers, a series of complex moral decisions (and big-time action moments) follow. The story is fast-paced and rarely lets up. While not as well woven as his previous novel, AMPED is a fun read, perfect for summer fun.

BELA LUGOSI'S TALES FROM THE GRAVE #2
Kerry Gammil, Sam F. Park, et. al
Monsterverse
52pp

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